What Carol Danvers Saw There

by Glides

Summary

What happened after Captain Marvel ended? This is one possible way things could've ended up going. Finding the Skrulls a new homeworld, reconnecting with old flames, discovering new enemies. Carol Danvers has been up to a hell of a lot in a very unconventional couple decades or so.

Here's hoping this can plausibly pretend to be canon for a good amount of time. Hopefully it won't have to purely become headcanon. With all the timelines out there, I suppose there will be one where this could've always happened, though I've tried my best not to change
Hello everyone! I have not done this in some time, and never on here. This is a character I've become a really big fan of, and probably my overall favorite MCU film now, and I couldn't stop speculating, so here we are.

Comments, suggestions, criticism, all are welcome. I want to get better at this, so let me know anything I can do as we keep on going. Any characters you don't recognize are not original creations of mine, I just tended to try and look for obscure characters related to the Kree on Marvel wikis.

The first one you'll meet here is called Khn'nr. For those who are unfamiliar (and this included me, bigtime), he was originally a previous Captain Marvel before Carol took up the mantle in the comics. He's taking on a very different purpose here than he did there. But he's not mine, I didn't make him up.
The Skrull and the Kree

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

1995

"Skrullos isn't an option."

"Of course it's an option. It's the last place they'd ever look. This ship can host way more than the few of us on board now."

The Kree and the Skrull glared at each other. This wasn't as ferocious of a glare as either of them could give, and the several others who were present for this argument all knew that. It made things even worse for the two that were glaring to see that everyone else was greeting this argument with a mixture of confusion and bemusement.

Finally, Talos visibly relaxed a little and says, "well technically, it's more your ship than mine, Vers."

Vers shot a look in Soren's direction, silently pleading for any indication of what her husband might be trying to do. Was this a guilt trip, was it a capitulation? She didn't have enough experience with Skrulls to know exactly how they communicated, though so far, in the couple weeks she'd spent with them, they were the least subtle species she'd ever encountered. Having spent so long being taught to see them purely as enemies meant that even after seeing the error of her ways, she still couldn't help but get defensive around them.

Soren, leaning up against a series of consoles on the right side of the bridge, just continued barely restraining a laugh, though from what Vers could read, it didn't seem to be mocking her so much as the situation.

"Why not Skrullos?" Soren's eyebrows arched in a way that Vers suspected she had picked from their very brief sojourn to Planet C-53, probably that neighbor of Maria's who she had described as "portly," who Monica had described as fat, and that word had ended up getting a sharp rebuttal from Maria and a barely contained smile from Vers.

Not the time, Vers reminded herself, I'll make my way through that later, it is not a necessary memory at this time when the survival of everyone on board relies exclusively on me.

"By now, Yon-Rogg has probably returned to Hala and told the Supreme Intelligence everything. I told him to do this, I gave them fair warning that if they tried messing with you or anyone else, I'd see to it myself. And since they know I'm allied with you, then they will probably monitor Skrullos, possibly with the Supreme Intelligence doing so personally. And I think they'd expect us to go back there because of your sentimental attachment to that planet."

Talos hissed at this, a few others did, tongues coming out in anger like they did when they'd been incensed, with only Soren not reacting at all, though the arched eyebrow disappeared.

"You watch yourself, Kree," a Skrull that she didn't recognize spat out through the hissing, "our sentimental attachment, as you call it, comes from a long line of families forced off by your kind. What if we did the same to your precious Hala?"

Vers shrugged. "I didn't feel attached to Hala even when I was a proper Kree, you do what you like
"C-53 then, because Talos tells us you were assimilated from there."

Now it was Vers' turn to arch the eyebrow, as it seemed to be the Terrans of C-53's way of expressing doubt and confusion, and since it had worked for Soren, it ought to work for her as well. "Assimilate?"

This Skrull turned back to Talos, still hissing a bit instinctively, still keeping the single Kree on the entire Kree ship in the corner of his eye. "How does the Kree not know this?"

Talos' posture relaxes again, he makes his way over to this Skrull, looking a considerable bit younger now that Vers had a moment to observe him properly, based on what little she knew of Skrull physiology, and places a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"Most Kree don't know how they become Kree. Give her time. It's a miracle we even got one to see reason."

This same younger Skrull turns back to Vers now, staring her up and down, though there was a clear difference between him doing it purely to figure out how dangerous she could be, and the Terran equivalent, which seemed to have something to do with their mating. Kree never did little things like this, and it thoroughly confused Vers every time it happened. The Skrulls and the Terrans had so much in common, and it didn't really matter if she was technically a Terran too, somehow, but it was those little things, the second language on top of the first, the kind where no one had to talk, that confused her the most, and got her lost in her own thoughts so often trying to comprehend this new language without having a cipher.

"Talos, I respect your command as always, and would follow you to the Great Beyond the moment we needed to. But can't you see that after all this, we haven't properly gotten to know who this Vers is and why we want a Kree assisting us? Who's to say she will not deliver us back to her Kree brethren on Hala the moment we stop watching her?"

Vers scanned the Skrulls in the room, seeing if the second language would come easily to her now that there was an opportunity to scan several of them at the same time, which they often didn't let her do. Only Talos and Soren would ever eat their meals with her, though the ones that had seen her fight off Yon-Rogg and the others often would stop by to briefly visit and say hello. Talos and Soren's daughter, who was not properly named yet ("Skrulls do not get their true name till they are fully grown," Soren had explained, and the daughter had eagerly nodded in response. She never seemed to talk), would spend the most time with her considering how few Skrull children there seemed to be, and how often her former comrades had targeted their young.

The Daughter was there now, though no one else had noticed her. There were a handful of Skrull young on the ship now that they'd been to a few other planets with survivors on them. The Daughter did not seem to like them very much. Only the Daughter seemed to universally accept her in a way that even Talos and Soren didn't.

By the time she snapped back into focus, several Skrull, Talos among them, were all loudly arguing in their native tongue, with a couple aiming strange looks in her direction having clearly noticed how distracted she was.

She tensed momentarily, a pulse of energy coming off of her, upon feeling a soft touch on her shoulder, turning to see Soren there and instantly converting the energy so that the very brief intense heat would be replaced with a soothing warmth. Soren looked briefly shocked, and lifted
"I didn't mean to disturb you. It's a Terran thing I noticed."

"Terran thing?"

"They touch each other differently than we do to express affection."

"I suppose." Vers went silent again, still watching the group of Skrulls bicker, hissing at each other, but none seemed particularly eager to actually fight rather than just argue their points out. She looked back at Soren, feeling a whole host of complicated emotions at once that she wasn't sure how to identify, probably more of the Terran part of her.

"They'll come around. It's just unheard of that a Kree would ever want to help us." Soren reached out with her hand again, and this time Vers let out a small smile of her own and nodded, and Soren very awkwardly put a comforting arm around her shoulder.

Vers briefly saw the Terran she knew the best, Maria, putting her hand on her shoulder in a similar way when she'd been Carol Danvers (she was still Carol Danvers, dammit, just it felt like that was someone else and Vers had replaced her sometimes), back before all of this, and just kept staring at the arguing Skrulls.

"Just as it is your first time being around us, truly, it is our first time being around you."

 Vers now sat awkwardly on the bed that had been arranged as part of her quarters, which was almost certainly Mar-Vell's former room. She had offered it to the still-recovering Talos, but he'd refused, stating that as a matter of pride, no matter how much she had done for them, he could not own or possess anything owned by a Kree.

But Talos and Soren and the Daughter were all there, and so was the Skrull from the settlement they had found who had been challenging her earlier, and a few others she didn't recognize who must be from that same settlement. Luckily, they weren't in the room to watch her sleep, but Mar-Vell's room, now her room, had become a sort of informal meeting place for anyone who wanted to convene with the strange Kree with several names. The Kree name was Vers, the Terran name was Carol Danvers, and according to the Daughter, who was very inquisitive and liked to sneak around, she had discovered from a Terran friend of hers called Monica that she had been given the official name Captain Marvel, because this Monica was the decider of all True Names.

The Skrulls had been very impressed by this Terran, though the Daughter would never say any of this out loud. The rest of the Skrull younglings on board had somehow been able to hear her in a way the adults and Vers could not, and the discovery of this True Name, kind of a surprise to everyone, had made Vers a subject of endless fascination. She could already fly and fire photon blasts from her hands, and they sure as hell hadn't seen any other Kree do that.

It must, according to some of the newcomers on the ship, be something to do with her Terran heritage, because there didn't seem to be any way to identify a Kree other than the place they'd been assimilated from. So for example, this had come down to believing that two of the members of Vers' old fighting force, Yonn-Rogg and Korath, had actually been assimilated from the planet Xandar since they seemed almost identical to Terrans.

The only two survivors, incidentally.

As far as Vers herself was concerned, the Terran called Monica had never mentioned a "Captain
Marvel" to her, so she wasn't sure where exactly that had come from, and so the subject of tonight's strangely informal meeting was figuring out from the Daughter how A) this Terran had such mystic powers in the first place and B) what the hell a "Captain Marvel" was in the first place.

The Skrull who had challenged her on the bridge had brought his own child, biologically male but identifying as a female (it was confusing for Vers, because the Kree sure as hell would've never allowed that), so that the Daughter would talk through her.

Some of the newcomers believed it was telepathic, but Vers wasn't so sure. She couldn't help but chuckle (and get some glares from some of the newcomers) when all it amounted to was the Daughter whispering very quietly for a few minutes into the other Skrull child's ear, looking at Vers occasionally for a reassuring smile that Vers always tried to provide, and so on.

Sometimes the Daughter would stop and get too shy, and then Talos or Soren or both of them would lean over and put their forehead against hers, and that seemed to give her the calm she needed to continue whispering. It was so highly unusual, but in the short amount of time Vers had known her, she'd grown to really like having the Daughter around and so the smile that was normally so difficult for her to let out (she had vague feelings she'd been asked to smile too often when she was young) was so readily possible in her presence.

The newcomers, noticing her clear fondness for the Daughter, had begun to relax a little around her because even if she was a Kree, she was sure as hell a Kree who seemed to genuinely like a Skrull.

Finally, the Daughter stopped whispering, turned so that her mother could hug her from behind, clasped her hands at her waist, and smile wide at Vers, who returned it readily.

The other Skrull child coughed and began to speak.

"She knows a mystic called Mahn-eee-cah."

All of the Skrulls except for Talos and Soren gasped in surprise and awe, the two of them rolling their eyes ever so slightly but only so Vers herself could see them do so.

"Mahn-eee-cah is a great and wise and powerful mind, who loves her eyes."

Vers snorted at this, causing a few of them to hiss at her and then look at the Daughter's reaction, but the Daughter kept on giving Vers the same adoring look, so the hissing quickly stopped. Vers put a gloved hand over her mouth in order to show at least a little respect to the supposed gravity of the situation. One of the major benefits of the Kree suit whose colors Mahn-Eee-Cah had changed for her (and the additions both Talos and Soren gave to it, combining aspects of it with their Skrull suits) is that it perpetually kept her clean, though she still took showers because it was one of the few Terran inventions she enjoyed, water for its own sake.

"Mahn-ee-cah knew her as Cah-Roll Dahn-Veers. That is her Terran name."

"She thought of Cah-Roll as her mother. She had Cah-Roll as her mother and Mah-Ree-Aah as her mothers."

Vers gave the Daughter a confused look at this. "I was her mother?"

"She thought of you like you were one."

"Oh."

She felt a little bad now. Not for leaving, or at least she felt bad for leaving Monica and Maria
behind despite how little she had known them and how well she had known them when she was Danvers. She had felt a very strange mix of emotions towards the one who was called Maria and that much emotion was a very uncomfortable thing, so it had been something she did not like to think about.

It made her feel very much like she was feeling towards Maria the way Yonn-Rogg had seemed to feel towards her.

"And Mah-Nee-Cah talked of a Terran who was now dead who was revered as a hero, and that you had come to replace him, but you had to be a hero for everyone and not just the Terrans, a Terran you as Cah-Roll seemed very inspired by."

Wait a minute, this did sound a little familiar.

And the Daughter pulled out something from her pocket and flashed it to every Skrull there, and they all gathered around to give the thing a very confused look, for it was a slip of thick paper and on it was a strange looking Terran with a very strange suit that had red and white and blue on it, and he was holding a strange metal object with those same colors in one arm, giving a weird hand gesture with his outstretched flat hand against his forehead.

Vers chuckled again, because she did recognize this as something she'd been handed by that friend of Fury's, "as a souvenir," before heading off-planet. That had been an insanely awkward conversation, that strange man had defended her back on C-53 but seemed to be even worse at socializing than she was.

"Cah-Roll gave it to her as a gift from C-53."

And then they all turned as one to give her a very strange look, heads all cocked to one side, something Goose the Flerken would do whenever he seemed confused.

Caught off guard, Vers only stares back for several seconds. The person on the card did look familiar, and she remembers what Fury's friend told her about him but not the experience of knowing who he was.

"Well, I was handed that by a friend of Fury's--"

"Who's Fury?" The Skrull who had challenged her on the bridge glared at her.

"Who are you?" Vers asked accusingly, with the same arched eyebrow that had worked so well for Soren at expressing confusion and doubt at the exact same time. Soren suppressed a laugh of her own at this and Talos, smiling a little himself, quietly put a hand over her mouth so that the rest of them don't notice and start another round of hissing arguments.

"My name is Khn'nr, and though I appreciate your help, I have to know as much as I can about you so we can ascertain whether or not you are a threat to us."

The rest of the newcomers hissed, some in support and some against Khn'nr, leading Talos to audibly groan and put his remaining hand over his face in the universal expression of exasperation.

"How many times have I told you that she's on our side?"

"Plenty of times, but after all her people have done to us, I can't just pretend like nothing happened!"

"If it makes it easier, mate, think of her as a Terran first and a Kree second, she'd only been
assimilated for six of her planet's years.'

Khn'nr frowned and stared between Vers and Talos. "How many is that?"

Vers looked up at him, a bit defiant, a bit annoyed with being questioned this much. "C-53 time goes as follows: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, millennia--"

"What does that mean?"

Vers frowned again, realizing that they may not have an equivalent for all of those terms, and that the Terrans and Kree both had pretty close measurements for how time was calculated. She lifts up a finger and counts off. "One, two, three seconds. Got that?"

Khn'nr frowns right back, looking a bit indignant. "Go on."

"Sixty of those is a minute. Sixty minutes is an hour. Twenty four hours is a day. Three hundred and sixty five of those is a year."

"OK?"

"Now multiple that last number by six and that's how long I was apparently assimilated for, which you," she says, pointing directly at Talos now, whose eyes widen in surprise, "need to explain to me."

Khn'nr leaned over to say to Talos, "She doesn't know she's been assimilated?"

"She does, just not everything about it."

"Should we explain?"

Khn'nr's daughter says angrily: "No, we're here to hear about the Terran hero and how she's the Marvel Captain!"

Vers' expression softens a bit, looking at the child, and she says "I'm not a Marvel Captain or a Captain Marvel or anything like that."

"She says you are."

"I'm not," she says again, a bit more forcefully this time. She looks at Khn'nr, almost pleading with her eyes, still overwhelmed by all the things in her memory that feel like they're hiding from her. "It would be easier if I explain it," then looks at the Daughter, "no offense, but I'm from there so I feel like it'll be easier that way." Talos and Soren look down at the Daughter to gauge her reaction again, but the Daughter only smiles and nods and walks over to sit comfortably in Vers' lap.

They all gasp again, as the Daughter tucks her head into Vers' shoulder and almost seems to purr the way the Flerken (impersonating a "cat," according to Fury) seemed to whenever Vers held her. Something clicks in her and she puts her arms around her, and she sees herself doing the same with Monica as Carol Danvers and calling her "Lieutenant Trouble," which for some reason had been something that had come back so easily, and must've been very sentimental to her as Carol.

There's a few seconds where she awkwardly holds the Daughter, enjoying the feeling but still not entirely sure if she's embracing this person right (she'd gotten an embrace from Maria she'd really liked, then from Monica, and then one from Fury that made her feel like they were siblings despite that not being possible, and that was her entire remembered experience with those). This embrace
was different than the other two, and that doing the same thing with different people meant different things. With Maria, this warm awkward feeling that made her blush came along with it, and with Fury, a sense of safety and security and knowing it was someone who would protect her with their life and vice versa. Then the strange man with the thick paper of the blue man had told her that he'd never seen Fury do something like that before, which made her feel still nicer.

This was different. It was a one-sided form of protectiveness that came along with it, and knowing that if it was ever called for, she would die for this person if it meant keeping them alive a little longer. This felt the closest to Monica, because that instinct felt magnified by a thousand and she realized she must feel about Monica what Talos and Soren felt about the Daughter.

Finally, after those few seconds, still holding the Daughter, awkwardly on Mar-Vell's bed in her Kree suit, she says:

"Tarnax."

Talos says: "What?"

Carol Danvers says: "We should go to Tarnax. I'll tell you why and I'll tell everyone else about myself in the common area. I'm not doing it here, it's too cramped."

She stands, still holding the Daughter, the photon energy beginning to radiate around her but designed to provide a sense of warmth and comfort to her, and uses tendrils of it to push Khn'nr and the others out of the way firmly. More and more faces pop out of the various rooms at the sound of the energy, Talos and Soren leading the way as she heads to the large common area.

Chapter End Notes

**UPDATE: 8/2/2019:**

Hey everyone! I just finished this one, so if you're looking for something different, you can begin reading the next one, called *Ghost in the Raft*, which concerns Ava Starr of *Ant-Man and the Wasp*!

If you've just started, I really hope you enjoy!
Chapter Summary

Carol and the Skrulls assemble (heh) with the intents and purposes of figuring out their next steps and trying to learn a little more about this strange planet she’s apparently from. Her mind is still a bit out of whack thanks to six years of assimilation from the Supreme Intelligence, she’s very eager to learn more, but the process to completely regaining who she used to be will be a very long and arduous one. Talos and his wife, Soren, are really the only ones she can get any real support from at this point.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Now that the entire population of the few settlements they had found in the last couple weeks had gathered, now she was beginning to feel distinctly nervous. This wasn't the plan, she was going to tell Talos and Soren and no one else, but they'd insisted, and insisted that despite her anxiety around people, that she should make an effort to get to know everyone because Skrulls value personal connection above everything else.

At least several hundred Skrull were now occupying the ship. Mar-Vell had built a large cruiser for herself and it could probably take thousands more before being completely filled (and the food processor was large enough that they could all be fed, and they didn't need food as often as she needed to), but it was many more than the few dozen survivors of Talos' initial grouping that Mar-Vell had been hiding.

She still worried often that the Kree would send a fleet after them. She'd been so exhausted after expending all that energy destroying the fleet that bastard Ronan had sent after her. Using energy at that level, she'd get a weird flash of something, and the moment she'd looked Ronan in the eye and hit her fists together, sending that cosmic wave across the length of his ship, she got the strange notion that Ronan was going to have a very humiliating death someday. He'd always been a slime.

But she was avoiding again, distracting herself from the huge group now crowded around the room. The Daughter was off playing with that pinball machine in the corner (apparently she and Mar-Vell used to compete with each other while she was alive), and the rest of the Skrulls all sat cross-legged and hissing and groaning at each other in their native tongue.

Talos and Soren stand next to her, it already seemed like the two had been accepted as the "leaders" for right now, until a proper colony could be established again. They’d only gone to the settlements they’d established personally before contacting Mar-Vell, so to find any others was too risky, lest the Kree be listening in like they always did. Carol might've been able to fight off the Supreme Intelligence once, but her photon energy was not unlimited and she could be exhausted of it if pushed too long, even without the inhibitor they'd been using on her for years keeping her from it.

Talos and Soren both spoke in their native tongue for a few minutes, which made Carol realize that she’d gotten so used to the various languages of the Kree (which is to say, none of them were their
own, even their written language was an amalgamation of all the species they had assimilated) that she'd never thought of a group of people only having one kind of shared language or shared tradition. As Talos had explained it, what they did now was all they remembered of their old ways, and that a lot of different groups had been forced to combine in order to survive. It was all a bit vague. Something about it reminded her that something felt familiar about this to her, but she wasn't entirely sure how.

And finally, they both motioned towards her at once, and Khn'nr's daughter screamed out "Captain Marvel!"

Carol sighed, but didn't try to correct her this time. It really was no time to be putting those kind of melodramatic names onto people, lest they start feeling like a Supreme Intelligence themselves.

Out of all the settlements they had found, only Khn'nr's seemed to be able to speak the common language of the Terrans, or at least could use a universal translator. Carol was so used to it being able to give her every word she needed to use (at least in the one Terran language that Fury used, he had told her there was at least hundreds of others but that he didn't know any himself), but the thing seemed to be intentionally designed so that Skrull languages couldn't be inputed.

She'd have to tinker with that later on, when she was on her own again. The Daughter, who seemed pretty adept at tech herself, would be of great help to her. Apparently Mar-Vell had been teaching her.

"I'll translate," Talos said, pushing her forward gently.

"Um, hello."

Talos translated, and a couple of them laughed, but not in the mocking way. Seemed to be more friendly, everyone seemed to have relaxed somewhat once they had explained their version of events.

"I'm Carol Danvers. I am apparently from Planet C-53, though I don't know an awful lot about it."

Khn'nr, from the front of the crowd, yelled out, "What do you know?"

"Very little. I know I was from there. I spent most of my life there, but I suppose when I was found by a Kree called Yon-Rogg--"

Lots of angry hissing at response to this, Yon-Rogg was nobody's favorite, an especially vicious Kree now that she'd gotten to hear more about him outside of the Supreme Intelligence's propaganda feeds that were transmitted to every loyal Kree household.

"I'd been working with a Kree called Mar-Vell that was sympathetic to your cause. This was before I was Kree, I guess. Yon-Rogg killed her, took me, infused me with his own blood to begin the transformation against my will and renamed me Vers."

She paused before continuing: "He killed a lot of you. I have killed some myself. I don't deserve any forgiveness for that. I will spend the rest of my life making up for it. And I'm not just going to protect you, but I will protect anyone I can who is being threatened, anyone who are their victims."

It had been a word she'd picked up from Fury and quite liked. He'd gone on for a while about how Terrans turned on each other for such arbitrary and pointless reasons. It made her very sad to leave, because there seemed like quite a few Terrans out there were people she ought to kill. He'd shown her a strange symbol called a swastika, and how it was the symbol of a group of Terrans who killed millions of people for arbitrary reasons, and Carol had enthusiastically promised to kill every
person she saw using one of those, and he'd had to talk her out of it, saying sometimes it was used for "bad guys in movies", and then--

"What does that mean?" Khn'nr again, looking confused. A lot looked confused.

"Um, people who are told to assimilate or else."

Talos translated, the rest began to chuckle a little bit at the wording, and then fell silent again, now respectfully waiting for her to finish her grand and great and heroic speech.

"So I guess what I mean to say is that I am no longer a Kree, I am a Terran, though I still don't know much about that planet or what the Terrans are like beyond the few that I have met."

Khn'nr yelled: "Tell us about the card!"

Talos yelled back: "Will you shut up?"

The Skrulls didn't need translating for that one, they all begin to chortle in a surprisingly childish way, causing even Carol herself to break out into a smile despite herself. It was far nicer smiling when she wasn't being told to all the time.

"The card. My friend on C-53 is called Fury, and he has a friend that protected me from a bunch of other Terrans who Talos tricked into trying to kill me--"

Talos coughed awkwardly, and Carol smiled and said, "You did a pretty good job."

Talos translated again, and now they all burst out into hysterical laughter as a series of high pitched electronic sounds from the back of the room let everyone know the Daughter had broken her high score at the pinball machine again.

Talos' response was to suddenly transform into the form he'd used to hunt down Carol and Fury when they had still been at odds with each other, a man with glasses calling himself Keller who was Fury's boss, and the laughter got even more intense, Skrulls falling over and slamming their feet on the floor, cackling and hissing. Talos posed in this form for several seconds, trying to look serious and dramatic, Carol staring at him completely baffled but still smiling, until he abruptly turned back and motioned for everyone to shush.

"Anyway, the card. Fury's friend gave it to me before I left. He said he was a great Terran hero several C-53 decades ago but he was unfortunately killed. He asked me to show the card wherever I went so that the whole galaxy learns of this Terran hero's memory so he can be the best known Terran in the whole galaxy."

The Daughter, turning, flipped up the card briefly enough for everyone to get the tiniest of looks at it, before fluidly slamming the card back down on the machine and continuing to play.

"I think I knew who this Terran hero was as a youngling, myself. Can I have it for a minute?"

The Daughter, in another fluid motion, passed it to the nearest Skrull, who passed it down to the next nearest, on and on and on down the grouping of hundreds of Skrulls until it reached Khn'nr's daughter, who yelled out "I've got it, Captain Marvel!" before rushing up to her and giving it to her with a big smile on her face.

"It's Carol Danvers. But thank you."

"You're welcome, Carol Marvel!" And Khn'nr's daughter rushed back up to her father, looking
more visibly relaxed now than he had the entire day, even smiling a bit himself.

Carol turned it around to read it. On her Kree datapad was, thankfully, the universal translator that could also scan and read text back to you in your own tongue, but as it did not have the Skrull tongue as an option ("their filth deserves no memory," she remembered Yon-Rogg telling her during training), she'd have to resort to the Kree language, and Talos nodded at her.

"I know them both, mate. I'll translate."

She shrugged, and held the datapad on her wrist above the wording on the card, and it began to recite it back to her.

"Steven Rogers was born on July 4, 1918 in Brooklyn, New York. He was the sole survivor of the Super-Soldier Serum, which on January 22, 1943, turned him into the greatest hero for the Allied Forces, the one and only Captain America! Sadly, a Nazi agent infiltrated the event and killed the one and only Abraham Erskine, the creator of the serum, so that Rogers would be its only successful subject."

"What's America?" Khn'nr asked from his perch in the crowd.

"Terrans are so territorial that they split their planet still further into pointless big sections they kill each other over, and that's the one that Carol is from," Talos said with a huge smirk on his face, daring Carol to try and correct him.

But Carol shrugged and said, "Yeah, what he said." Then continued and read still further: "Unfortunately, his conflicts with the dastardly Axis menace The Red Skull led to his death on February 5, 1945 over the coast of Greenland, crashing his plane into the ice so that the bombs aboard the Red Skull's ship could not be detonated. He lived and died as he was his whole life: a hero."

Talos translated as best he could, but some of the wording proved to be a bit difficult and many of the Skrulls cocked their head in that confused pose they seemed to do whenever they didn't understand something. Honestly, Carol wasn't really sure what most of this meant herself, she'd never properly looked at the card till just now. She figured the Captain America in question had to be the man wearing the strange outfit on the front of the card, as his skull seemed a similar shade of skin color to her own. He looked very familiar, this must've been someone she had recognized as a historical figure on C-53 during her childhood. She saw a flash of two things, a poster featuring this same Captain America with the words "THE FIRST AVENGER" underneath, an older man that she recognized as her father telling her about what a great man this man had been. She then saw a flash of the fighter jet that must've been her own back when she and Maria had been pilots for Dr. Wendy Lawson, or how she'd known Mar-Vell before becoming a Kree.

The jet said CAROL "AVENGER" DANVERS on it, and Maria smiling wide at her in a way that made the Carol of now blush again and doing the same when this had really happened, and saying "your father would be so proud," and Carol responding in earnest, "fuck my father, I'm doing this for me," and the two of them laughing hysterically about it, Lawson chiding them with her hands on her hips--

"Carol?"

Several seconds had passed again, she must've zoned out again. This was getting more and more frustrating. A memory altered by the Kree, Talos had explained, does not just come back all at once, that's not possible. The mind must make those connections again, bit by bit by bit, but the memories were still there. They had attached a device to her forehead that would create pulses of
kinetic energy that was meant to encourage those connections to reform themselves, but with the level they had assimilated her, they weren't honestly sure if everything would come back.

"Steven Rogers, was, I suppose, a hero for the Terrans, and I suppose this Red Skull must've been for him and the Terrans what the Supreme Intelligence and the Kree are to you. He must've been a very evil one."

"Terrans are weird," said Khn'nr's daughter in response, but nobody laughed this time, the mood had gotten far too somber. There was a brief several seconds where they all bowed their heads in honor of the dearly departed Terran hero, died far too early, and would never ever come back.

"Other question," said Talos after a few seconds, "Why Tarnax?"

"Well," Carol said, "I know that Tarnax is one of the few Skrull planets they don't know how to find, and if we were able to get there without being detected by them, we'd all be home free. The Supreme Intelligence had always wanted to find it, but never could, and I suppose you or your ancestors must've done something to make it undetectable."

"We didn't," said Talos, "the entire system is surrounded by billions of miles of gas and asteroids aplenty, impossible any signal to make its way through, which is also the disadvantage. After Skrullos and Torfa were destroyed, we never dared going back there, for all we know some of us might've survived in the planets across the system, much like Mar-Vell hid us in the planets across your Terran system."

Carol had never gotten the names of the planets closest to C-53, but they were still in the same solar system as before. There had been one settlement on a red planet that was closest, and then a few more on a few moons past the asteroid belt that split the system in two, orbiting a giant planet with different waves of storms and gas and a huge red spot near the bottom.

"Why did you not tell us of this before?" Talos asked.

"Well, because I didn't want to say anything while Yon-Rogg was still anywhere near this system. He's back at Hala by now, which means they're too many light-years away to be able to detect our presence until we move. But to be fair, I don't know for certain if this is the right choice, just that as far as I know, the Supreme Intelligence saw the Tarnax system as the biggest threat to its existence, because it couldn't find it through all those rocks and gas."

"I'm from there, you know," Talos said, and Carol suddenly noticed his eyes getting distinctively watery. "Tarnax IV, specifically, me and Soren both are from there and we left in order to find new planets and new cultures to interact with. All we found were the Kree."

The Skrulls bowed their head almost as one in reverence, a few of them letting out the guttural yell she remembered Talos making when she had met them aboard the ship for the first time, before Ronan had sent his fleets after her. The sound had disturbed her and saddened her then and it did so even more now. She knew she was one to crack a joke in times of stress but these days, knowing she had to leave Fury and Maria and Monica behind, never learn more about who Carol Danvers had been, she wasn't as much in a joking mood.

Talos, Soren, Khn'nr, the Daughter, all of them, having to hide for years in a backwater system, from the very people she believed herself to be a part of, though deep down she realized she had never truly felt connected to the Kree no matter how hard she tried.

They would go to the Tarnax system then. Somehow. Talos would have to figure out the logistics of that, she was good enough with tech and liked to tinker with things, but converting an entire ship
for lightspeed travel was a bit beyond her abilities. She would wait, and keep watching as the ship scanned the rest of the planets and moons in the Terran system to see if any settlements had been made without Talos' prior knowledge, as the Kree definitely knew about this system's existence now.

She tended to flash back to the previous six years in dreams or in waking moments when she was left nothing else to do, minus the several weeks she had spent on her true home planet, perhaps the only fond memories she could consistently bring up. Talos had only been able to unlock a small portion of her memory, memories that were held inside the wreckage of her mind by the sheer emotional trauma they seemed to cause. Some good memories were there too, though she didn't always understand the context. Navigating her own mind felt impossible so it was a minor miracle Talos had been able to at all, when they had still been enemies.

She was back in the machine now she had been in when Talos had first captured her, or at least an approximation of it, though no longer restrained and upside down like she had been before. The purposes of this were to manage her brain slowly making those connections that had been denied to her by the Kree inhibitor chip, its scar still aching and red and present on the back of her neck.

Vers was, of course, very hesitant to go through this again, but the Daughter had promised to hold her hand through the whole thing. Talos had noted that since they weren't searching for anything in particular this time, the experience wouldn't be nearly as jarring, just a sort of countermeasure to keep herself from getting overwhelmed. The translation was getting to be an issue, as the wording between Kree and Skrull was very different. Kree spoke in subtleties and concealed all emotion and feeling, you had to unearth a million different layers before figuring out anyone's true intentions, while Skrull were proudly direct and to the point.

"The dirty secret is that there is no such thing as Kree, at least not technically," as Talos had tried to explain to her. Part of her re-education, as Soren jokingly put it, was trying to explain the parts of Kree society that even the Kree themselves did not know. None of it was for certain, as only the Supreme Intelligence knew for sure, and how it had been created, no one was sure. The Skrulls had not been able to find much, though the one word that they'd been able to translate was the word "Xorrian." Whatever that word was, it had no definition in any language they knew of, including the hundreds of Terran languages and dialects.

So they first began, once they had left C-53, to try and explain the Terran system as best they could, but even that had been a bit garbled and Vers knew that once she taught herself one of their written languages, things would go by a lot easier.

So they asked her what she had learned. She knew what at least one Terran language looked like, the one used in the "country" of "America," the one where she had once lived in and where Fury and Maria and Monica lived in. She had heard from Fury, right before leaving, that the government of this country, and its leaders, wanted to offer her an incentive to stay and exclusively protect that one part of the planet from the other Terrans they didn't like. Fury himself hadn't been enthusiastic about it.

Talos and Soren, who had been the only ones with her during these early days, both thought the notion of defending one part of a planet from the rest of it was a ridiculous notion, and Vers couldn't help but agree. She may have been a Terran once, but with exceptions they came off as remarkably dull-witted and barely able to process much of anything, obsessed with petty conflicts for reasons that felt so arbitrary that it felt like a giant joke when Fury had tried to explain it to her.

But the three agreed that the Terrans, when their best and brightest showed up, also showed the
level of commitment and trust that they saw in Vers herself, which she disagreed with. She certainly liked herself more as a Terran than as a Kree, but Fury and Maria and Monica had been on a whole other level to her. They seemed the very best of what the planet had to offer, and perhaps the friendly-looking dead man in the blue suit as well, if he was still alive.

That conversation had gone nowhere, she could list random words and phrases like Radio Shack, a place which had the most advanced technology C-53 had to offer for civilians. Pegasus, which is where Mar-Vell, disguised as her old mentor Wendy Lawson, had once worked, but she'd been told that was based on something called a "horse," which she had seen a few of driving through the desert.

Just random words. Didn't mean much to her. So Talos and Soren filled her in from what they were able to gather.

It wasn't much. The Skrulls had been singularly interested in Vers herself, but they'd been able to gather that Terrans seemed very similar if not identical to Xandarians, which brought up a whole other set of questions. Vers had volunteered at this point that she believed that Yon-Rogg and Korath, two of her former colleagues, might as well be Xandarians since they sure as hell had never been to her homeworld.

It went nowhere. So they decided that if she ever returned, their friend Fury could fill her in on what was needed to know about that planet.

But back to their previous point. There was no such thing as Kree, at least not anymore. Kree was more of a blanket term for any being that had been assimilated by the Supreme Intelligence, though they suspected there was a genetic species known as Kree once. The Supreme Intelligence manifested in itself a sort of blue liquid that could serve as blood for all carbon-based lifeforms that needed it, and symbolically one Kree would transfer their blue blood to another, which in turn would begin their genetic transformation.

Which in turn explained why her old colleague Minn-Erva's skin had turned blue and Yon-Rogg's had not: as time went on, prolonged exposure to the blood would in turn manipulate your body to the point where you'd become even more subservient than before.

Which also meant that Yon-Rogg and Korath must've been relatively recent converts as well. Something about this mass exposure to the structure the Supreme Intelligence was kept in seemed to erase all but the most emotionally poignant of memories, to remove all individuality and connection, so that you may serve as a better footsoldier for the Kree.

If it wasn't the Skrulls, it would be the Xandarians. If it wasn't the Xandarians, it would be someone else. Vers' first clearly defined memory was Yon-Rogg looking at her gravely, tubes connected between them, the blue blood going in as the red blood came out, someone commenting that they'd never seen red blood before and how silly that sounded. Then the Supreme Intelligence, which had appeared to her as Wendy Lawson, though she'd only met it once when she was first assimilated and then once right before the fateful mission to Torfa, where Talos would find her and accidentally send her on the path to her own autonomy and freedom.

Talos, upon her telling him that, smiled and said, "Nobody freed themselves except for you, all on your own, love."

Vers protested, but he went on to say, "We kidnapped you, beat you, scanned your consciousness for our own ends. We were desperate, but we did nothing to help you with that."

Then years of training, years of no one except Yon-Rogg consistently talking to her, the loneliness,
the missions to planets she was told almost nothing about, the bloodthirsty rage instilled in her upon seeing a Skrull, how many she killed because of how intensely she believed it had been a Skrull that took her life away from her. The photon energy instilled in her that she was forced to repress and not use, told it was a gift from the Supreme Intelligence that she must train over time and not use all at once. The lies.

All this as flashes from the machine, Talos and Soren's voices in her ear like the first time, though they didn't force her to scan any particular part of her, they weren't searching for anything, just whispering barely heard words of guidance and encouragement.

She thought only of the Daughter's hands holding her own, and the fear that she might squeeze so hard she might crush them, and as everything began to flash and play back in patterns she didn't understand, that was the only thing that kept her centered, not hurting this beautiful wondrous child like she'd hurt so many others.

Her brain began to make strange connections between things. A flash of Yon-Rogg, giving her a look she couldn't calculate, a flash of Maria giving her the same look, both during a time before and after the assimilation. Something from Carol Danvers came back, as a brief conversation between her and Maria.

"I can't read people. I can hear what they're saying but I can't read their expressions."

They seemed to be in the bar she'd once met Fury in. She identified the woozy feeling as drunkenness off of a Terran narcotic of some kind, a liquid in a strangely shaped structure. The more she consumed it, the woozier she felt, the more her head spun.

She remembered the feeling of so badly wanting to hold Maria but not even daring to ask. Maria seemed imperceptible, but the feeling was that she was expressing a lot of feelings of some kind but Carol couldn't tell what they were. The music and the lights were too loud for her but not for Maria. Even before Yon-Rogg, she couldn't figure that out.

"Carol, what does that mean?"

"I can't read you. I don't get it. I can't read you."

Her words aren't coming out right. They sound slurred, and Vers takes it in this strange sense of detachment through which she's viewing the memory that the narcotic is contributing to this in some way.

Suddenly, the feeling changes and what she sees next, she doesn't entirely understand, and it's so unfamiliar that suddenly she's able to yell both in the memory and out loud: "Take me out!"

The machine slows to a stop, Maria's face fades away and what she sees instead are Talos and Soren and the Daughter staring back at her, looking concerned. She's gotten better at reading people since then, clearly.

"We weren't looking," Soren says, face blushing a darker shade of green than her skin, and Vers gives her a confused look before rebutting with "Well, you better not be snooping on me, now."

They smile, but Vers can't help but be a little disappointed that they didn't find the joke very funny this time. A consistent part of both the woman who had been Carol Danvers and Vers is that they enjoy their own sardonic sense of humor even when no one else does.

Yet it seems as though both Talos and Soren seemed to understand what she saw right before being pulled out better than she did, and that can't help but confuse her.
I forgot to mention this, but I'm basing this off the assumption you've already seen the movie, and I didn't want to keep flashing back to events in the movie unless it was absolutely relevant. Very sorry for any confusion!

Talos' wife is called Soren here as that's what she's named in the Marvel Cinematic Universe Wiki, even though she's never given a proper name in the movie. As I intend for her to be a pretty major character in this lil yarn I'm trying to weave, I think it's regressive to just refer to her as a wife. Soren she will be from here on out.

The Daughter is named as such because she's unfortunately not given a name in the Wiki. But since it's a child as opposed to a spouse, didn't seem as reductive as long as I didn't specifically call her Talos' Daughter. So she's The Daughter here, a Daughter to them both.

Khn'nr's daughter doesn't get a name either, and she's only listed as Khn'nr's daughter because I (don't think) I've given him a spouse. But again, I can revise the wording any way I need to if need be, I want to make sure I'm not unintentionally being regressive at any point.

Tarnax is also a real place in Marvel Comics continuity but not currently known in the MCU, but as it's the other major Skrull planet in the comics canon, it'll serve as a good homeworld for our lovely Skrulls here. Xorrian is also a relevant term in Marvel Comics continuity, which I found after a while of reading wikis and some old panels that I was able to find, and I promise there's no OCs. All of this comes from one canon or another.

There's also, as you know, the first of the references I could not help but make, but I figure it is VERY in character for Coulson to throw that damn thing around pre-first death (I've never watched "Agents of SHIELD," sorry!)

Also all the dates are taken from the Marvel Cinematic Universe Wiki so I'm not pulling them out of thin air, I pinky swear I'm not! I really don't want this to violate canon except by mistake.

Once again, any suggestions, comments, anything I can improve on, please don't hesitate to let me know.

I'm typing this up in a coffee shop before I have to get back to work and my god, it's freezing! Stay safe out there, if you're reading this, because everyone needs to know just how much they mean to someone else.

Caffeine makes me sentimental, forgive me. OK, I'm gonna post now. Wish me luck.

- G
Hello, Nick Fury! We were bound to get to him again at some point, and he ends up getting up to quite a lot in a pretty small period of time. So I thought it would be best to check in on him and one Maria Rambeau to see how everything was going on their end of the universe. They'd still be in touch, most likely. They'd both be insanely worried about a person very near and dear to both of their hearts.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Nicholas Joseph Fury spends part of the next several months, when he's not working, trying to learn as much as he can about Carol Danvers, the goddamn noble warrior hero. He'd gotten to know her as Vers pretty well over the several weeks he'd known her. He knew basically everything about Vers. Any more digging into Carol and he'd know more about Carol than Carol did. He'd had the sneaking suspicion that he was not going to see her again for a little while.

There was the Nick Fury of SHIELD and the Nick Fury who only Carol and Maria Rambeau seemed to know.

He'd gotten to know Maria and Monica a lot better. Nicholas Joseph Fury had always been known for being pretty antisocial, though friendly enough to those who tried to talk to him. He was not disliked, as far as he knew, by anyone at SHIELD, though he had the reputation for being not very fun at parties. Director Keller seemed to like him, and some speculated that a workaholic like Fury, someone who seemed allergic to fun, might very well replace him someday.

SHIELD did not know that Fury spent as much time snooping on them, or at least trying to without being caught, that he spent snooping on whatever rogue elements he was assigned to snoop on. This fact never gets out. Never. Not even when SHIELD goes to pieces about twenty years later, Fury is never ever seen as the kind of person who would spend hours setting up various encrypted channels to snoop on everyone, hours in front of the computer.

Unable to sleep, mainly. But he's afforded a level of respect because he's seemingly the first human being to encounter an alien, a real live one, confirmed on national news and everything, and suddenly he's not pushed nearly as hard as he usually was by his superiors and his colleagues, so he resorts to pushing himself even harder.

He is teased behind his back a lot for not marrying and not having children. He never even dates. Nothing. Doesn't even seem interested in the notion, just working, but why else would you work here? This stops once he becomes Director and everyone who ever mocked him for this is terrified that they lose their jobs, but most of them don't. Most of them, despite the mockery, are damned good agents.

But this is all far out in the future. Fury in 1995 does not know that almost thirty years later, he will
disintegrate and suddenly be transported five years in time, he will not know that Carol will spend five years grieving him and Maria and Monica when they go through the same thing, he will not know all that transpires. Fury in 1995 only knows Steve Rogers as the dead World War II hero, he knows Tony Stark as that one douchebag who's always bragging about some invention on TV and that Steve Jobs seems terrified of him, he sure as hell just thinks Thor Odinson is a myth he vaguely heard about in some high school history class.

Fury in 1995, still a well-respected agent but an agent, just over Coulson in seniority, searches for Carol, or at least who Carol was before Carol had become Vers. No one but Maria and Monica know that Carol was his only true friend.

Some are surprised when Fury is assigned this by Keller personally. Fury doesn't aim for a promotion, he aims for the assignment regarding the person who made his life hell, supposedly.

The first reason he is assigned the Carol Danvers case is because Keller absolutely does not want it coming out if at all possible that the alien who got into a very public fight on a Los Angeles subway, appeared suddenly in the bayous of Louisiana, and then proceeded to destroy an alien fleet above the American Southwest that caused thousands of tons of alien debris to hit the desert to be identified as a former Air Force pilot. The military liaisons make it perfectly clear that their reputation will not be dragged through the dirt, and possibly affect recruitment. 9/11 is years away, so they have no excuse as of right now to plunder Middle Eastern countries for oil.

Fury is decidedly not fond of these types. They often send the same types of assholes they send to offer movie scripts in exchange for access to military gear. His personal involvement in the case makes the liaisons very suspicious of him. His aloof manner, his lack of deference to people who should be considered his superior, all of that makes him a potential communist in their eyes.

Keller assures them otherwise. Fury, for his part, is absolutely invested in doing this right. Least of all because he knows that the last thing Carol wants, if she isn't killed out in deep space, is to be a celebrity here on Earth.

So he moves to possess the footage filmed of Carol on the subway by a wannabe indie filmmaker asshole type, he moves to have agents scoping the country to find each and every person who took a picture of her in her Kree suit, possess it, take it all away, threaten them with life imprisonment if they don't comply. He knows this isn't going to work perfectly, he knows that there's lots of blurry photos and footage of Carol on internet forums. Two years later, "Men In Black" will release in theaters and he'll walk out of the movie once they begin to erase people's memories. They show it at SHIELD headquarters and he does this. Coulson, ever the kiss-ass, runs after him and asks what the matter is. Fury yells out at the top of his lungs, "I could've used this shit two years ago!"

He then informs Keller he's going to document her life as best he can, then classify as much of the info as he can. He is only partially truthful about this, though he does erase any public record of her. This isn't as difficult as he thought, in some ways.

She was born Carol Susan Jane Danvers on October 1, 1969 to Joseph and Marielle Danvers in Beverly, Massachusetts. It was very unclear as how she got any of her first and middle names, until he found record of an aunt of Joseph's called Carol. She was the youngest of three children. She had two older brothers, Joseph Jr. and Steven, the latter of which was named after Steven Rogers, the famous World War II hero. Records from the hospital indicated that both Joseph and Marielle made a big deal to note that the two older boys had been planned but Carol had been accidental, a punishment from God in engaging in carnal relations. This came off as insanely bizarre to Fury, because he never heard of a religion where sex was sinful after two people were legally married. It made more sense once he discovered that they had gotten married because she had gotten pregnant
with Carol. How the first two children could be born before this shame kicked in still baffled him, though.

Joseph and Marielle came off as two very strange people to Fury. They had apparently met after Joseph had saved Marielle from drowning while he and his two oldest sons was off fishing and she crashed a biplane into the Atlantic Ocean. Fury had discovered at this point that the two oldest boys had a different and now deceased mother, but that for whatever reason, no one in the family except the two parents had known this. Carol was her only biological child, it seemed. Whoever this first mother was, Fury had no idea.

The two boys, thanks to records from a therapist Marielle went to, were given clear preference over their daughter, though Marielle herself did not seem to particularly care about this. She was a stay-at-home mother, never working, taking care of the family, and it is noted that she was deeply annoyed by how Carol had insisted on making her own meals at a very early age, as soon as she was able to cook.

Fury couldn't help but smile the moment he read that. Not necessarily legal to break patient confidentiality like this, but he was SHIELD and for Carol, he was going to break a few laws to read about a couple clearly terrible people.

Even back as a child, Carol really did have a major independent streak. Even as Vers, that rebellious streak never seemed to go away.

Some of Vers' only remaining memories involved moments of embarrassment and humiliation. She had mentioned a couple times an instance where she'd been driving go-karts as a kid, that a friend of her brother Steve's had knocked her off course and she'd injured herself, causing her father to scream at her in front of everyone. She had tried out for baseball and got hit in the face so hard with a baseball that she got a concussion, causing her father to scream at her again. Her father screamed publicly, her mother screamed privately, and it didn't take long for Fury to conclude that her parents had both been emotionally and verbally abusive to her.

Around middle school, a young woman called Maria Rambeau began to visit her grandmother in nearby Boston over the summer and, rejected by the kids in that area (Fury could identify with that), began to wander to Beverly, not having much else to do. Maria described this as "wandering," though in reality, this actually meant her grandmother would drive her there to see shows at the Cabot Theatre and the North Shore Musical Theatre. This is how she apparently encountered Carol for the first time, at one of these shows and they made their first friend in each other. Marielle Danvers could never get her husband or her boys, so Carol had to be her excuse to watch a production of Oklahoma! or whatever was currently playing there. This was information Maria provided very readily, she'd kept a pretty vivid record of Carol after she had vanished and laughed at Fury when he asked her how she knew all this.

"You think I wasn't going to remember her in some way? And you knew I'm the closest to her and didn't ask?"

With Maria's contributions, connecting the dots became a lot easier. Monica eagerly offered to help, and Fury offered Maria contract work as a SHIELD pilot, which she refused, but still threw in a free flight to Washington D.C. She and Monica brought their whole record (during the first week of summer vacation, with Maria taking off from her current jobs as a seamstress and a mechanic) to the headquarters and were introduced to everyone as "cousins I haven't seen in a while." Only Coulson knew more (not intentionally, he was just as nosy of a bastard as Fury was) and he knew well enough to shut his trap.

Carol and Maria had gotten very close, very quickly. Fury could tell as soon as they saw each
other, despite the vanished memory and the amount of years, that they had been as close as two people could possibly be. Whether or not that had been something more, Maria refused to say, though he suspected as such with how Monica talked of Carol like she was a second mother to her. It wasn't Fury's place to figure out, they were both intensely private people, and the last thing he needed to do was get his only other friend in trouble just for who she wanted to love. Fury himself had enough tact to shy away from the topic, though it was Monica who seemed really upset that she couldn't talk about "Auntie Carol" as she saw her.

Fury had only said: "Your mom and Carol are very private and I wouldn't want to violate that privacy."

To which Monica had said: "Stop talking like an instruction manual!" and both Fury and Maria laughed, eager for any chance to relieve the awkward tension that was going to inevitably come up.

It also was therapeutic for the both of them, in different ways, to talk about Carol. Fury hadn't known Carol for very long in comparison, but Maria had already figured out that Fury was even more antisocial and hidden than they had been, and didn't seem to connect with anyone sans his mother, Mrs. Fury, who they actually got to meet on a couple occasions. Mrs. Fury would come in and bring cookies for Monica and Fury seemed only excited to see her, the Rambeaus, and Carol.

But they had been really close. For Joseph and Marielle, it was a chance to get the child neither of them wanted away from them, and Maria's grandmother absolutely adored the spunky little girl now following Maria around everywhere and asking for recipes to cook and to look at her toy plane collection. Maria's family were proud military members, for a couple generations back, ever since World War II.

There was even an old story about how Maria's grandfather had met Captain America himself back in the day, though it hadn't actually been during combat. Steve Rogers, as Mr. Rambeau himself put it to the two of them, had been a very private man himself, somewhat introverted and shy and despite his godlike physique, didn't act like he had one on him. He would randomly appear in different mess halls wherever he might be stationed over the two years he was in service. That was how Mr. Rambeau had gotten to talk with him, being the single soldier brave enough to venture over to him and start a conversation.

He had proudly served in the 92nd Infantry Division, the Buffalo Soldiers, so to see Steve Rogers there was a bit of a shock considering he was usually going off against the Axis' elite division HYDRA as opposed to their conflicts on the Italian front.

But there he was, the only white man in a room full of black soldiers, though from how Rogers put it, he admitted that he knew none of the other white soldiers would enter the tent, and that it hardly made him a paragon of virtue to use their own prejudices to gain some privacy.

Rogers had been an odd duck, as Mr. Rambeau had put it. Mr. Rambeau had been barely 18 in 1943, and simply wanted to go to war to prove himself to himself any way that he could possibly be able to. He was very used to white people mistreating him severely and also the ones who expected a reward for treating black Americans with the slightest bit of decency, then throwing a fit when they were not immediately worshipped where they stood. Rogers was neither, as far as he could tell. He had no interest in being said as "the good white man" because he had a better idea than most that such a thing was impossible in a country built on white supremacy. When asked about this (the conversation had apparently gone on for a couple hours, and it took Rogers' telling their commanders that he needed to brief them on classified intel to get them the rest of the day off), he stated that he'd grown up Irish Catholic and was treated like crap for it, but that he hardly felt as though he'd been treated the worst for it. All he had to do to avoid any bad treatment was to
never mention it to anyone else. He had the ability to hide the traits that the country found undesirable. It was a shameful thing, and his existence was almost complicity in it, and he needed to do better.

Steven Rogers said a lot of strange things in his day.

Rogers was a strangely educated man, Mr. Rambeau said while Carol, Maria and her mother sat in rapt attention, but not the kind of education that made you feel stupid and insecure in comparison. Rogers was educated very differently than that, he'd read any book he could get his hands on as a working class kid in Brooklyn could find. Irish mother, father unknown. He could very will admit pretty readily that as bad as he was treated, the Jews seemed to be treated worse, and black Americans treated worse still. The Nazi rallies in Madison Square Garden, the enthusiastic reception to *The Birth of a Nation* decades after its release, *Gone With The Wind*, all of that frightened him quite a bit and he resolved to educate himself and find the flaws within the system.

The conversation had not been one where a white man had magically inspired a whole room full of black men, and it sure as hell hadn't really been a lecture either. He'd gotten asked the usual questions about the super-soldier serum, whether he was seeing anyone, how much weight could he lift, how the shield had gotten made, what Howard Stark had been like, and so on.

He just ate his meal, and finally when everyone else had asked all their questions and left, many of them to their death, Mr. Rambeau had remained and started asking him those more personal questions. He did not remember Rogers as a particularly great man, but he did remember Rogers as someone who seemed to want to do better than he had, to admit to his own failings as a person, someone who recognized the system they were defending was not perfect and systemically subjugated people, and likely never would stop.

"If he had lived through the war, he would've been labeled a communist," Mr. Rambeau had said, and Carol and Maria had both laughed until his expression told them to stop.

"Communism is something to aim for," Mrs. Rambeau had bluntly stated in response.

"Joseph McCarthy didn't care. Most of the folks him and his ilk went after weren't even communists. He wasn't ever a communist, but he sure as hell wasn't satisfied with things. He wouldn't have made it about himself either. He spoke of wanting to use this influence he never wanted to boost other voices, more marginalized voices."

Fury, as an agent of SHIELD, had learned to never talk about this sort of stuff so to hear Maria relay this (and to show him the journal entry they had written together about the experience) made him feel frustrated more than anything else. The agents of SHIELD "did not see color," Keller didn't see color, Coulson luckily never said dumb shit like that but even he was a little like that. Keller was an infuriating person to work with in a lot of tiny ways like that.

Fury mentioned how flippant Keller had been about the L.A. riots and how he liked to mock Spike Lee movies whenever Fury was in earshot and try to awkwardly quote Tupac lyrics (the phrase "Real eyes realize real lies" was literally printed out and taped to his door), and all that came back at once and made him sigh in response to all this.

"He never shuts up about these things, as if I want to spend every waking moment thinking about it. I actually preferred him when Talos was impersonating him, and before he made the dumbass comment about 'Havana,' Talos just never said anything like that."

Maria burst out laughing, Monica looking confused, and Fury began to laugh too. "Talos was literally so polite and considerate that the fact that Keller wasn't an insensitive asshole clued me in
that it wasn't him!"

Monica just folded her arms and glared as the two adults kept on laughing hysterically and said "I don't like inside jokes."

Maria simply said, "it wasn't an inside joke, baby. It's just difficult to explain."

And then: "Why did he talk about the L.A. riots so much?"

And then Fury, in response: "Why do you think?"

They went back to going over the records, though that particular chapter did stand out to them in a big way. Both Maria and Carol would've had a better opinion of Steve Rogers if not for Joseph Danvers' hero worship of the guy.

That came out in a lot of the journal entries Carol and Maria (and the ones where they'd write them together) during the same time, though Mr. Rambeau's story, when casually related back to Carol's parents, caused them to stop worrying so much about her new friend.

This then devolved into annoyance when Mr. Rambeau flatly refused to see either of them, and only would talk if Carol showed up by herself, because he wasn't about to relive his trauma for an army brat family.

Joseph had proudly served in the Vietnam War, though his military record, which Maria had wanted to see for years, was absolutely atrocious, which cracked her up. He was reported a lot for fights, for public drunkenness, generally coming off in everything they found about him by his superiors and his fellow soldiers as a domineering arrogant asshole, the kind of blowhard who responded really poorly to all the nasty jokes hippies made about him when he came back.

Yet his commanders also reported how they liked his "gumption" and his "go-getter attitude" and so he was never dishonorably discharged, at least for much longer than you'd expect, till even they had grown tired of him. Between the time Carol was born and the time that she met Maria was when the papers had been filed, and after being rejected by the Boston Police and Beverly Police departments for his criminal record (he'd gone to jail several times for public drinking, fights, what have you), he instead became a construction worker, making a decent enough wage for the time, and was promoted simply because the job removed a lot of the temptations that would plague him for most of his life.

Not that Carol had known most of this. She had known he had been discharged, as it had happened when she was a kid, but right as high school was starting for her was when she was forcibly ejected from the Danvers home, never to return.

Fury, ever the oblivious one, asked why.

Tears formed in Maria's eyes, as she gripped the journal Carol had written about it in, and said "Why do you think?"

Chapter End Notes

So this is our first look at Fury. It was difficult to figure out how to write him because I didn't want him coming off as too impassive or stoic. So hopefully we've found a
Joseph and Marielle Danvers, and their other children: all Marvel characters as well. In the comics, Marielle was actually an alien and Carol was half-Kree by default, but that doesn't seem very fitting for our MCU equivalent to be "destined" for any sort of power, feels better that she found it by accident as an ordinary human and is just trying to make the best of it.

Beverly, Massachusetts is a real place! According to Wikipedia, about 26 miles away from Boston, but it's also the place in the comics that Carol grew up, so I didn't wanna change that. If you're from Beverly or close by to there, I have tried to make the description vague enough that I'm not describing it wrong. The two theaters I describe had performances during the time that a young Carol and Maria would've met, too!

Lot of my own history nerd tendencies coming out in this more reflective chapter, but don't worry, we don't stay in this gear for too long, and I have some different stuff planned next. So as always, any comments, suggestions, anything I can do to improve would be greatly welcome here!

Till next time!

- G
Sacrifices Must Be Made

Chapter Summary

Our first appearance of Yon-Rogg as he is forced to return to the Supreme Intelligence to receive his punishment for his failure, and it's not quite what he was expecting. Revenge is in order, of a particular sort. Plots are put into place, plans are conceived, the two sides beginning to converge into one.

As for Carol, she's not in the best situation either. Doing the right thing, as we know, often means making choices that'll hurt you and benefit others, and where she's at, she's going to make a very difficult choice indeed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Yon-Rogg wouldn't open his eyes.

This was more than rude. It was petty.

"Open."

He sighed and did. It was Vers. It was always fucking Vers, and he knew the Supreme Intelligence took the form to taunt him, so that one day it might be anyone else who appeared instead of her. This was what he hadn't been expecting. In all his rage and panic at being so easily defeated, he'd expected to see what he always saw whenever he witnessed the divine glory of his master. He would see a version of himself, hair silver like it always preferred, clad in that awe-inspiring uniform. He'd gone to see it very often because he could see this perfect ideal form of himself, and now it wouldn't appear to him like that.

He knew something few others knew about it, that you could resist the form it would initially take, that you could, with mental effort, change it as you wished. Until that blasted Vers showed up, it had appeared as his own mentor, the one known as Zen-Pram, the greatest he'd ever known. Over time, he'd been able to transform it into that version of himself he desired to see so badly. But as soon as he'd seen that cursed Terran woman on the beach, the moment he'd come back and seen the Supreme Intelligence again, it was her with silver hair and it took quite a bit of time and effort and meetings with it to turn it back to himself again.

Vers herself had correctly guessed it would take her own form (without concentrating) right before the fateful mission to Torfa, but Yon-Rogg had played coy at the time, and in no way was he about to admit that to his underling. But they were all gone now. Only Korath was still alive, and as soon as he returned to Hala, he requested to transferred anywhere else, and was immediately assigned to Ronan the Goddamn Accuser. So now Yon-Rogg was left on his own, a commander without an army, a soldier without his brothers and sisters in blood.

This was, of course, the trap of the Supreme Intelligence.

Yon-Rogg also knew he was being spared from a much worse punishment as the Supreme Intelligence was allowing him to keep himself, the himself he had formed once he had been
assimilated. He wasn't sure why. As soon as Carol Danvers, Vers, had arrived, she'd been inserted into the structure it was contained in, along with thousands of others at a time, and had herself forcibly removed from herself, a blank slate reprogrammed into someone designed to be trained by Yon-Rogg.

Yon-Rogg himself, of course, had gone through something similar. All commanders do to some degree, he suspected. Zen-Pram had done the very same, and his commander had before him, and so on and so forth till the time the Supreme Intelligence first cast its divine wisdom upon the known galaxy. His earliest memory was Zen-Pram's blood replacing his own, though he didn't remember the color. He hadn't realized he hadn't started out as Kree until Vers.

Fucking Vers.

He'd figured out by now that Yon-Rogg must've been a part of his original name, wherever he was from, much like Vers had been the part of her name he had taken from Carol Danvers of C-53, that small part of her being the only part of herself she was allowed to have, in the service of the Supreme Intelligence, in the service of making all life pure and whole, the fragment of your old name reminding you of the impure bloodline you had come from before.

Zen-Pram must've had the same, so had Ronan and Korath and Minn-Erva and Supreme Intelligence knows how many else, fragments of names becoming the new names, all in the name of the Kree, in the name of a universe with no conflict.

Occasionally, there were aberrations in the design. He remembered an incident when he had first arrived where a couple who had been assimilated from Centauri-IV had had a forbidden child (Kree were not allowed to have children or indulge their base desires), and in an attempt to hide the child from the Supreme Intelligence, sold the newborn into slavery. The Supreme Intelligence then punished them still further by forcing the newborn to be raised to be one of the battle-slaves that provided the Kree their entertainment.

He'd been quite famous for it. Yon-Rogg smiled, remembering the amount of credits he had won betting on Yondu Udonta. Who knows where the hell that one had ended up.

"Stop with the distractions."

"You sound like her, but you don't talk like her. I never noticed that." Yon-Rogg smiled at the image of Vers before him, even as he tried not to show how uncomfortable he was.

"Do I need to be a perfect approximation to be to your liking, Yon-Rogg?" The Supreme Intelligence smiled, clearly enjoying taunting Yon-Rogg at least a little. "I am hardly the one whose life may very well be on the line."

Yon-Rogg wasn't particularly afraid of dying, and both of them knew that. To be sent back empty-handed had been the humiliation to end all humiliations, Vers had done it on purpose, and both of them knew that too.

"Vers is not going to a matter to deal with in some time, Yon-Rogg," the Supreme Intelligence said calmly, "She cannot fly at the speed of light on her own, and I doubt that Skrull ship of hers has that capability either. They will have to procure it, illegally. And when they try to steal it, as I suspect they will, that is when we will have found them. Our first concern is still the Skrulls."

Yon-Rogg smiled himself now. He didn't care if he had been assimilated. He didn't care if he didn't know who he was before the Kree.
All that mattered to him was getting on top again. Being in charge again. Being the commander again. Getting Vers to look at him with that admiring look again and not the one of casual distaste that was seared in his brain.

He would get it from Vers herself, some way or another.

"Ah, you don't want to kill her."

"Not if I don't have to. I'd rather her be put right back where she started, to take Carol Danvers from her and make her Vers again, put her right back where I started. And when she is Vers again, like she should be, we won't give her the inhibitor."

"You get to decide this?"

"Not at all, Supreme Intelligence. This is what you'll most want too. It is best for the Kree. And when this has been done, we will tell her her memory was taken from her by that bothersome Terran on C-53, and that the whole planet assisted in her torture, and send her back there to kill every single last one of them herself. And she will save that bothersome Terran she looked at so fondly for last, and her small child."

The Vers that was the Supreme Intelligence's smile grew wider and wider.

"And the second she begins to take their lives from them, slowly, delicately, painfully, that is when we will have it all come flashing back at once, and then she'll remember everything the second she's finished having her way with them."

"You've gotten bloodthirsty in your time away from home, Yon-Rogg."

"Oh no, not at all. Once she's done, we'll just take her back and turn her into Vers again. And then we won't ever do that again. With no Skrulls and no Terrans, she'll have no one who could possibly bring her old self back. She'll be my faithful companion--"

"In a military sense, I hope."

"Of course that," Yon-Rogg stifled an angry glare to try and look polite and deferent still. "That's what I meant."

"Good to know," said the Supreme Intelligence. "It's good that you obey still, Yon-Rogg. There is much you can be rewarded with."

"I'm not afraid of death, so there's no need for threats."

"Oh, Yon-Rogg," said the Supreme Intelligence, "I would never kill you. Too valuable to our cause. But you do have fears and weaknesses that can be exploited and I'd have to train you out of them. And I think the best way that I could would be make my own version of her, and leave her in here with you, for a few months."

The voice suddenly changed, the tone got perfect, for all intents and purposes it was Vers in there with him. No longer wearing the green Kree suit, as before, but now in the jumpsuit she'd been wearing when they had first met on C-53. The silver hair now dirty blond, the voice was the perfect pitch, everything the same.

"You won't be able to move. You won't be able to blink. And she'll say everything you don't want her to say. You may not be afraid of death, Yon-Rogg--"
And suddenly something green and bulbous came out of Vers and shifted upwards till they were two separate entities, Vers on the ground of the white and silvery simulation and a mass of green tubes connected to a digital head, the true form.

"But you do have very interesting fears, and I can read you like a book."

Vers in the jumpsuit smiled and said, "Wanna fight?"

Yon-Rogg smiled. "We sparred a lot. You told me to train her. Is that a crime?"

The bulbous green mass above Vers smiled itself, its voice distinctly digital and deep. "Want me to make her say something else?"

And suddenly Yon-Rogg caught up, realized that if the Supreme Intelligence had full access to his head, she could say a lot of things he'd never want to hear out loud, and he gulped.

"I know everything about you, Yon-Rogg. I know everything about everyone that has ever been exposed to me. I know everything about Vers from the last time we talked. Concerning yourself with one individual when there is an entire impure civilization to eradicate, systemically torturing our empire, is a concern that is not fitting."

And then the green bulbous mass retreated back inside the copy of Vers, though still wearing the jumpsuit, still looking like she had the day they had met, as she walked over towards Yon-Rogg, unable to move, grabbing him by the throat.

He could feel the pressure from outside the containment of his own mind, the metallic tentacles of the true Supreme Intelligence grabbing him by the throat as well, constricting him, hard, hard enough to make an average Terran pass out.

"The Kree exist so that an example of a truly pure being can be shown to the galaxy. No impurities. No subjugation to base desires. Our first concern will and always will be the Skrulls, any of them who will not join this model. When they are assimilated or eliminated, we will turn our attentions to another group. Petty concerns, petty revenge, petty instances, all of that is not fitting for one of your station."

The hand around his throat somehow felt just like Vers' hand, from when they spared, though she had never done this exactly.

Vers smiled. "It was a mistake to let you train her. You sparred with her very often for a reason, and I am no fool."

And as she vanished, as the white and silvery image in his mind vanished, leaving the metallic tentacles pulling themselves from Yon-Rogg's body, he heard only in his own mind, "I have plans for you, Yon-Rogg. Await further orders."

For the first time, Yon-Rogg left the Supreme Intelligence feeling all of his vitality drained from him, barely able to move as a couple of Kree attendants ran to him, using a holo-lift to carry him from the structure containing the Supreme Intelligence. And so he went, back on the train leading to his barracks, the only one left in his section, every Kree there getting to see the fallen commander, taken out by own of his own after she betrayed him for a planet she had never been to before, so the holo-net reports would say.

They'd look and laugh and jeer, the man in the Kree uniform, skin not even properly blue yet, snickering at his failure, then going back to watch the latest battle-slave event on the holo-net, lamenting that Yondu had never come back. Whether anyone really was laughing or that Yon-
Rogg was interpreting every look that wasn't pure adoration as mockery, that's not for anyone to decide. He was the type who secretly craved validation and respect. Craved it. Craved being told how superior he was, craved the adoring looks, craved the forbidden desires. Nothing but filled to the brim.

He gave the incorrect room upon being returned, with what little of his voice he still had. He knew his faculties would return to him in a few hours, at least as far as he was able to tell, but until then, he'd have to lie back and wait for the strength in his body to return.

He gave them Vers' room instead. They pushed him, on the holo-lift, inside and closed the door after him, leaving him alone to see the setting suns through the window giving him a view of the city. The planetwide city of Hala, a gleaming mass of green and silver buildings, those lovely colors both that he had dedicated his life to.

Vers had an unusual trait for a Kree, something he suspected was a repressed part of her Terran heritage. She liked to tinker with metal and other such things, and had fashioned an attachment to the vents that let sweet smells of various sorts, liquids she may have bought from forbidden vendors off-world, waft all over. Kree didn't do that, such a thing had never been seen and there was technically no rule against it, so Yon-Rogg never told the Supreme Intelligence, lest it in its wisdom forbid such a thing.

Yon-Rogg, in a moment of what he now knew to be weakness, decided not to be wise in that moment like the Supreme Intelligence was.

It was the only comfort he had now. He was far too proud to cry, even privately, knowing the Supreme Intelligence was always watching wherever they went and whatever they did. But he had the attachment, the invented device with the sweet scents, and it calmed him eventually to sleep. All the Supreme Intelligence would see was Yon-Rogg looking strangely relaxed for someone who had just endured what he endured, it would get confused and then it would stop looking.

He was not connected to it at the moment, it couldn't read him in the room. Yon-Rogg had only the slightest concept of intimacy, but his mind did not go to such places. His only concepts of it were its carnal form, the way that Kree children were created, but all he flashed back to was the days he sparred with Vers, the six happiest years of his life. He had never let on how he had lived for those days.

Such an attachment was a weakness. He knew it. He tried very hard to hate her as he drifted off to unconsciousness in her former room.

He tried because he did not want to admit to himself that though she was deeply foolish to reject the embrace of the Supreme Intelligence, she had a conviction in it, and had never really gotten along with anyone other than him anyway. They had spent six years almost exclusively with each other, Yon-Rogg teaching her all he knew of Kree combat in every form.

Six years, taken away by the goddamn Terrans. He had had her all to himself, and even if he could not indulge himself the way he had wanted to, he had had the sparring rounds with her, and that was all that had kept them both going for that long, he was sure of it.

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On Vers' part, she ended up thinking of that around the same time Yon-Rogg did, half a galaxy away, floating on the photon energy she had crafted for herself in what was once Mar-Vell's room. Her thoughts of it were very different than his.
Vers' thoughts towards the sparring was that it was the only chance she ever got outside of missions to do much of anything. She volunteered for every mission out of boredom, mainly, and also a desire for revenge. In every Skrull face, she had seen the one who had ruptured her memory. She had spent six years searching for that Skrull, which she now knew had never actually existed. The one she had spent those years looking for had been the one closest to her the entire time.

The sparring had just been the only thing she was allowed to do. Her only freedom and the only time she was out of the room, and she got very good at fighting because it was all she wasn't punished for doing a lot. Her fellow classmates in the early days, where she was taught the Kree version of history, taught about the Skrulls, taught about all the groups of people that needed to be killed, the entire galaxy basically trying to kill them, were not fond of her. She asked a lot of questions, was incredibly groggy in those days because of the assimilation, keeping her in that mentally vulnerable state so she would accept everything she was told. She always asked questions and always annoyed everyone else because of it.

She got used to being alone, and only Yon-Rogg seemed to like her jokes. It was evident from the beginning, even before she had learned the truth, that there was something off about her, an inability to understand subtlety in people. She could read words but not faces and expressions and she got used to hanging around Yon-Rogg because he seemed to want her around. He'd invite her to the fights and have her challenge whoever was there. Vers lost a lot. She lost very often. She hated not immediately being good at something. She hated how frequently the photon blasts would kick in and knock her off the floor. She could win, eventually, but only by hitting them with them, which was when Yon-Rogg started telling her to restrict the use of them, which made her feel even more repressed and upset.

One day, Yon-Rogg would keep telling her, they'd find the one who did this to her and then she could get her revenge.

What no one else but Talos and Soren seemed to know was that the fight with Ronan's fleet had drained her. Not to the point where she couldn't move, but the energy within her, while immense, was also limited, and she resolved to teach herself how to use it as wisely as possible, because she couldn't have it shut off in the middle of space and have her choke to death on the vacuum at that point.

She'd been practicing most of the day, and some Skrulls had come by to watch her see how long she could maintain a photon blast, how long she could fly outside the ship. The fight with the fleet had taken several minutes, and that had completely wrecked her for a few days.

She was getting better. She was doing it the way she'd gotten better at the sparring rounds with the Kree, and Yon-Rogg in particular, who would always volunteer when no one else eventually would. It helped that this time, she wasn't getting constantly criticized like Yon-Rogg would criticize, never offering praise. The Skrulls seemed genuinely excited to watch and would offer notes, and she'd actually found herself really enjoying this self-imposed training as Talos and Soren and Khn'nr continued fiddling with the ship's controls and trying to learn a way to achieve lightspeed capability.

They had reached a planet with rings that was called Saturn in the Terran tongue Fury had used, and upon reaching it and marveling at them, Talos had announced they were going to land on one of its moons to check something.

When she had asked what, he refused to answer. "It's a superstition sort of thing, love. I just need to see it for myself and I'll explain it once we're on the moon's surface."

When asked what the moon was called, Talos had stated that the moon was called Titan, at least
according to the Terran book on astronomy he'd snuck on board with him, and it annoyed Carol immensely that he'd learned how to read the language she must've known at one point faster than her.

So to take up the time on the way, she'd commenced with the training so she'd have something to do. She was not going to spend her days competing with the Daughter in pinball (it bored the hell out of her, but she indulged the Daughter anyway and kept on getting lower scores than her, it was difficult to coordinate the damn thing). She'd train herself in combat, going through the motions like she had back on Hala, and then she'd maintain a proton blast in space for however long, see how long she could breathe outside the ship, come back in sweating profusely and panting, only to have whatever Skrulls that were nearby cheering her on.

Upon discovering she could properly fly, a lot of the Skrull younglings begged her to let them fly with her for a little bit, though eventually it was negotiated to be inside the hangar so they wouldn't die in the vacuum of space. She took one at a time, flying only at twenty miles an hour or so, the youngling in question whooping with joy, the Skrulls not working on fixing the ship or contacting other settlements coming to watch, laughing hysterically.

She won over most of them in this way. It was refreshing to be around so many friendly folks for a change, who were refreshingly unsubtle in what they thought about things. Khn'nr's response upon her taking his daughter for a flight was to yell out in front of everyone, "you'd better not stink up her clothes!"

To which she had yelled back: "She can't possibly smell any worse than you!"

Kree would've found this distasteful but the Skrulls let out the groan that indicated they did find it funny and a lot laughed and clapped her sweaty self on the back and she couldn't help but laugh in front of all of them, a sweaty heap on the ground.

She liked being liked. The younglings especially were drawn to her, despite her abilities she didn't act like she had them and they all wanted to hear the exploits of the Captain Marvel, a name she still wasn't comfortable with but it sure as hell made the Daughter happy to hear it and that's all that mattered.

She'd have her dinners and now everyone wanted her around, no one hid from her now that they had figured out that Captain Marvel was their friend and not their foe, and now whenever she sat down in the ship's mess hall, a different group of Skrulls sat with her and talked casually in a way that didn't feel petty and pointless.

Talos and Soren she still spent the most time with. Talos, in particular, was a big smug about how he knew the rest of the Skrulls would eventually come around. "We forgive pretty fast," he said, "and you're easy to forgive."

She so badly wanted to go back to C-53. She wanted to find a way to introduce Fury and Maria and Monica to all of the Skrulls and go places with them. It was a childlike notion. It was like Carol Danvers was rediscovering herself.

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Carol had been brought in to the bridge of the ship where the new crew, decided from who had the most experience flying, all stood at attention with Talos and Soren looking uncomfortable at the front.

"What's this?" She asked, confused.
"There's good news and bad news, love," Talos said back, scratching his head, looking thoroughly uncomfortable.

He made his way over to her and gestured for her to sit down on one of the chairs lining the table behind the piloting rig, for where discussions like this one could occur. "The good news is that we know exactly how we can reach Tarnax and establish a real colony for ourselves, after we visit Titan. The bad news is that we don't have a proper way to jump there. We'd have to go at proper lightspeed."

"So what, just do that."

"Not so simple, love. You're thinking of the Kree method, the Xandarian method, where they can warp between different points in space and make their way there, bing bang boom. This ship is capable of achieving lightspeed, with the adjustments that we made, but it doesn't have the components we need to make the jumps properly."

"I always forget the official name," Carol said.

"Universal Neural Teleportation Network," Soren said helpfully. "You know what wormholes are. We don't have access to UNTN tech with this ship."

Carol frowned, putting her head on chin to process all of this. She had never really tinkered with ships, just little gadgets and doodads, like that one thing she had made in her room on Hala to put those sweet scents in her room. She wished she had taken that with her. She figured she ought to go back some time to snag it.

"The jumps allow us to go through space without adjusting time, but we don't have that option. We're going to have to make at least one jump without it, and that means very little time will pass for us while it'll pass for everyone else. Now, if it was just us on this ship, we'd do that with no hesitation, but you're on this ship, and there are folks you care about out there."

And then it clicked. Maria and Monica and Fury would all be older.

"How much time?"

"We're honestly not sure, love. These things aren't nearly as consistent as some people like to think. Time is an inconsistent mistress to mess with, but we've got plenty of it so long as the Kree don't find us. Now, we would only be doing this once, we're headed to Xandar in order to get ourselves the proper components so we don't have to do that again, and it's a hell of a lot closer than Tarnax would be."

Soren walked forward and said, "if we went straight to Tarnax, Fury and Maria and Monica would die instantaneously."

The other Skrulls in the room all cocked their heads to the side again, deeply confused.

"But if we head to Xandar, I don't think it would be more than a few years. I think. Again, these things are not consistent with an improper jump like this. I know people who have been through it out of necessity, and it just feels like you're going insanely fast. The ship itself can make that jump with no damage to itself or ourselves."

Carol put her head in her hands, reeling, trying to think of all the possibilities. In those few years, any or all of them could die, she might receive a notice from Fury's beeper that she had made for him, she wouldn't know, in a heartbeat he'd be dead.
Talos got down on one knee next to her, staying close but knowing her reticence to touch and respecting that.

"It's our only choice, Carol. I wish there was anything else we could do, but you and I both know we're not safe in this system. To go between planets is one thing, to go lightyears is another, and I wouldn't ask this of you."

Soren said, "The ones you left behind know the cost. They know you can't be everywhere at once. And it's not your job to defend the whole galaxy all by yourself."

Carol sighed quietly. "And after we have the necessary parts it'll be like an instant right?"

Soren said, "It'll be like time is passing normally. Maybe minutes or hours, but no skips."

Carol said, "We go right back to Earth once we've got the parts, no matter what. Or a pod. Something."

She kicked the floor and said sadly, "I should've kept Yon-Rogg's stupid pod."

Soren said, "He was dangerous, Carol. It was good to get him far away from the Terrans."

Carol sat silently for a while. A few years would make Monica a teenager. She still couldn't remember who her father was, though she knew somehow that he and Maria still talked on occasion and that he paid his alimony on time, and that the divorce had been mostly amicable, though she couldn't remember the reason why.

She had been given a calendar by Fury, listing Terran days and months for the years 1995-2010. She could only hope she'd remain on that particular spectrum. They couldn't dally or wait any longer. They had to act. The Kree knew exactly where they were, they had to go somewhere advanced and populated. The Xandarians were also hated by the Kree, she'd been taught that they would be targeted next for assimilation after the Skrulls, so they'd eagerly defend them against their old rivals.

She held the beeper, always attached to the little pocket of her Kree suit, held back tears.

"I'm so sorry," she said quietly to Fury and Monica and Maria. She wouldn't age a day.

Carol looked up at Talos and Soren. She nodded slowly, holding back tears.

"I'm so sorry."

Chapter End Notes

Yon-Rogg has been the toughest to write so far, as I had to decide how he'd come off. Tougher still was that as I was writing this chapter, the bonus content of the DVD release revealed that he sees himself as the Supreme Intelligence and I was already too far in to want to change it! So originally, it was supposed to be that he always sees Vers as the Supreme Intelligence, now it's only since his failure on C-53. My little compromise so it's still not breaking canon while trying to create that dynamic.

These things aren't planned too far in advance, I have very vague ideas of where I want this tale to end up going now that I'm in the thick of it. This is often the highlight of
my day to write these.

Also look up the Supreme Intelligence on Wikipedia and that's what I was trying to imitate when it gets all body-horror-y for a few seconds there.

There's about to be some ch-ch-ch-changes! Suggestions, comments, anything I can do to improve, please do not hesitate to let me know! See y'all on the flip side!

- G
Both sides have spent the past several years preparing for the next conflict, and now they're about to get one. Yon-Rogg prepares on Hala, while Nick Fury prepares on Earth. Neither side of this conflict knows what's going to happen next, neither side knows where the catalyst that accidentally set it off could possibly be.

That catalyst is about to make an unexpected return.

Vers didn't show up again.

Yon-Rogg spent the next six years (funny how it was six years, always six years) waiting for her. Not anywhere in particular, just in her old room in Hala. The Supreme Intelligence had plans for him, and it hadn't been kidding.

He had been forcibly placed in a pod, inside the room, shining with the same energy he recognized from the ship. It kept him forcibly restrained and drained of his energy, yet ensuring his muscles would not atrophy. Vers had been a miraculous accident, and what the Supreme Intelligence wanted to do would take time. If C-53 had their symbol, then Hala would have a symbol too.

It didn't really keep track of him during that time. It spent the whole six years desperately searching with its probes everywhere it could for any presence of the Skrulls. Nothing. Empty settlements across all of the Terran system. Nothing, nothing nothing. For the first time in a long while, nobody was invited to convene with the Supreme Intelligence.

Yon-Rogg didn't care, even as the holo-net went insane with speculation, though by its will and might the planet continued to run itself exactly like it had before. The holo-net was placed inside his pod so he could watch it, but he didn't use it for that.

He wrote. He wrote a lot, using the neural link to have his words appear. He had searched for the trace of the Supreme Intelligence and it didn't seem to be anywhere inside the structure itself. He could feel himself slowly changing. What had happened to Vers happened in an instant, what was happening to him would take longer, it would be more calculated and constructed, he would have none of the limitations that it knew she had.

In a half-conscious state, he was aware of the passing of time but it somehow didn't bore him or annoy him like it would to anyone else.

It felt like nothing else he had ever experienced. He felt himself slowly fusing with the schematics the Supreme Intelligence had inputed into the device, one that hadn't been used for a while. He felt an inhibitor chip being installed on his neck.

Six years of nothing. That's all he knew. No Skrulls anywhere. Eventually, it turned its attentions towards the Xandarians, the probes and forces were sent after them, but Yon-Rogg could tell it was
a distraction, a waste of unnecessary lives, those who had been disloyal to the Supreme Intelligence and thought they could have more. Yon-Rogg tracked this in the pod with some bemusement.

After what felt like ages, he was released from the pod but something had gone, and he wasn't exactly sure what. He had been fused to a Kree suit of some kind, a different kind, similar to the previous one but with a new design, a red spiked hologram over where his mask had been, and he had bulked up considerably.

He felt the Supreme Intelligence awaken inside of him. Yon-Rogg wasn't much there anymore, it seemed. He was now two. He was now a mortal physical vessel for the Supreme Intelligence. His punishment was complete and he had deserved it.

He was still largely himself, though his voice now sounded artificial enough that it didn't quite sound like Yon-Rogg either.

He felt the same photon energy inside of himself. He realized how good it felt. How he must be stronger than Vers now.

Then he was introduced in a skirmish against the Xandarians. A border planet that he wasn't given the name of. He worked in concert with the Supreme Intelligence. It wanted to kill those who refused to assimilate in person itself, and he would be the vessel it would do it with.

It announced him on Hala, on the holo-net, as attached to a new weapon of war developed by the greatest of the Kree minds, one known as En-Vad, called the Magnitron. He didn't like the name, but he knew it came from one of the old myths the Kree were taught during their re-education. He knew it all, the Supreme Intelligence let him know. Though it possessed the same body as the failure Yon-Rogg, it was not quite him anymore.

He subjugated. He tortured. He killed. He became a scourge of the Xandarians. The story of Vers seemed not to be as widespread as they all feared. Not a trace of her or any of the Skrulls for six years. Perhaps they had died in space, perhaps they'd taken damage from an asteroid, but either way, the source of his desires and his hopes was gone, and for the first time, he got perfect rest. One more gift from the Supreme Intelligence.

But then there was a day where there was a loud scream and the quarters that used to belong to Yon-Rogg and now Magnitron were trashed, windows blown out, furniture thrown around. So much yelling.

The Supreme Intelligence discovered quickly the source of it.

His old obsession, Vers, had just let off one of the Kree sensors surrounding the Terran system that they had installed specifically for that purpose, so that particular thorn in their side could be tracked.

She set it off on purpose, and they both knew it.

=================================

The Carol Danvers assignment had fallen by the wayside by so much work, so it had gone very slowly, and Keller no longer reported on it quite so often as he used to. Terrorists of all kinds, such conventional enemies, enemies that bored the hell out of Fury.

The result of his alien encounter is that he just didn't spook easily as he used to. So when the towers fell in New York, he was saddened but not particularly frightened. He figured the fact that ordinary human beings had been the culprits meant that Carol Danvers was doing her job damned
well. He felt a little guilty for feeling that way. It was a horrible moment. But he felt a bit exasperated by the media response, exasperated that everyone was pointing fingers at people who clearly didn't do it.

Just like the goddamn Kree, he thought. Humanity deserves to go extinct.

He and Maria had kept up with it. They went over how she'd been kicked out of the house in high school. The irony had been that she and Maria were (at that time) not actually together. But they sure as hell suspected it. Joseph and Marielle Danvers didn't need a lot of proof and it was one less mouth to feed, a mouth that talked back too often.

Carol stayed initially at Maria's grandmothers (Mr. Rambeau had died a couple years earlier, but she'd loved talking to him), but by then Maria's parents had gotten to know her, and offered to have her come back with them to Louisiana and she didn't even hesitate.

Karma seemed to punish the Danvers family for this. Steve Danvers, the golden child, was one of the casualties in the Gulf War two years after Carol had initially vanished. All the reports had gone to the Rambeaus, not the Danvers, so they didn't even know Carol had vanished until after Fury had come knocking for information, pretending to be a military type. Maria had gone with him, as herself, which caused the three remaining members of the Danvers family to get defensive.

That's how they found out Steven Danvers had died. And that's how they found out their youngest daughter and sister had supposedly died in a plane crash.

"Serves her right," Joseph had said. "Shouldn't have been taking unnecessary risks like that. Pilot, my ass."

Junior, the surviving Danvers, had tried to defuse him. He and his sister hadn't really gotten along, that much was clear, but she'd been gone for quite a few years and not having heard anything from her until now was very unnerving.

Junior was an architect now, he had gone to school and then moved to a firm in Maine not long after, leaving the two eldest Danvers alone to mostly bicker and argue with each other. They lived in the same house they had bought decades earlier. No mortgage, no debt of any kind, but also not making a lot of money as Joseph continued to degrade and Marielle continued not knowing how to make any living at all thanks to their archaic gender roles.

They hadn't heard a thing. They wanted to know why the military suddenly gave a damn about what they thought. Fury explained that they suspected there was foul play in the crash (not a lie) and that they were gathering information about the deceased for a legal case.

He pressured the three of them to sign NDAs that they didn't actually need to sign (Maria pretended to sign one too for effect), genuinely enjoying messing with them for so long. They got the most amount of information out of Junior, who had apparently kept very sporadic and somewhat cordial contact with Carol until the crash. She had vaguely mentioned info the two of them already knew, that she'd struggled a lot in the Air Force and developed a reputation for being able to kick anyone's ass who talked back to her. She wasn't allowed to fly in the first place because of the law banning women from flying fighter jets, until on a whim she and Maria had both applied to Pegasus, under Wendy Lawson, and spent some of their happiest years testing out what would become the Lightspeed Engine.

This was when Monica had been born, in 1983, while Maria had been trying her best to date and marry a man called Frank (Maria refused to provide a last name, and Rambeau was her maiden name). Maria had been very young when she'd given birth to Monica, and like Carol's parents,
married because she'd given birth to a child out of wedlock.

Fury didn't ask much about this Frank, but apparently he was a nice enough person but they were fundamentally incompatible. He was a quiet person, never picked a fight, never argued, never mistreated her. The two still talked. He had apparently pulled Carol aside and told her that he was sick and tired of how long he'd gotten in her way. Carol never quite figured out what he had meant.

Carol had always been very oblivious. "No wonder you and her got along," Maria had jokingly told Fury.

Fury actually got along decently enough with Carol too. He spoke of Carol very fondly, calling her "the bravest goddamn woman I ever met" for how fearless she was flying planes, like she had a death wish. He'd gotten to watch some of her early flights and honestly thought she was going to crash with how elaborate her movements in the air had been. She may not be particularly coordinated, but she seemed entirely unafraid of death.

Fury liked him well enough. Not enough to talk to him again, but at least thankful that he was there as a father for Monica as much as he was needed in either of their lives. Maria spoke of him as one of her closest remaining friends.

Monica, for her part, had grown to be a very rambunctious teenager. She was seventeen now, and was going to finish high school in the next year and still not entirely sure if she wanted to go to college. She was forbidden to join the military, and instead was considering joining the New Orleans Harbor Patrol, since she loved being out on the water and wanted to defend people like her Auntie Carol.

Fury and Maria were against this too. "You won't defend anyone who deserves defending as a cop," he would say, but she was still very idealistic and he figured this argument was unwinnable. She had the nickname Lieutenant Trouble still for a reason.

The fact that a seventeen year old could talk to a deputy chief of SHIELD (he'd since been promoted, though being stationed in Bogota, Colombia kept him away from Maria and Monica and he hated that) was kind of miraculous on its own. Keller had since left, being replaced by Alexander Pierce, who Fury liked a bit more but still had an odd feeling about. Pierce was a man of much fewer words and had less interest in winning people's approval, which paradoxically made him more popular still.

Coulson was his second in command, more or less, though he continued to insist to be treated and titled as a regular agent so that no special attention would be placed on him. He was useful mainly because nobody realized exactly how much influence he could actually have, which in turn meant that Fury could continue his snooping. He was so distracted with his Carol case and managing the situation in Bogota that he never noticed how people would conveniently be difficult to track if they had a personal connection with Pierce.

The last person he had with him, someone who had been somewhat convenient to keep around, was an agent that had caught his eye by the name of Clint Barton, who very unusually insisted on using a bow and arrow in all of his assignments. He'd been passed around due to this insistence until Fury
learned his record was perfect, and brought him over to the Bogota branch, where the perfect record continued to stand. He was a very young guy, early 20s, and a bit of a brick wall of a personality, but he got results. He could keep using the damn bow and arrows because they worked so well.

He'd continue to visit Maria and Monica as often as he could. Maria finally accepted the offer to be his and other SHIELD agent's personal pilot, flying Quadjets wherever they needed and making more than she ever had before. Monica was still insisting on the Harbor Patrol but Fury mainly did it to stop her from going into law enforcement, and to help his old friends out now that he could. He used part of his own salary to pay her without telling her. He didn't want the amount being offered, enough to buy out his old neighborhood in Huntsville, Alabama several times over. Parts of it, through various corporate names and charitable donations, went to trying to refurbish the city, anonymously, without displacing any of the current residents. He began doing the same in Maria's small town outside of New Orleans.

Frank's fire station, abruptly gifted all the funds they'd been trying to raise for years, benefitted greatly from that.

Years later, it would be a baffling mystery as to why the folks in a small community outside of New Orleans and Huntsville, Alabama were listed as the happiest folks in America. How did they get all that money despite being mainly working class citizens?

He was frugal. He wasn't much for luxuries. He dedicated himself to the work. All that money was pointless to hoard.

He was asleep in his small cot in the small area of the massive living space he'd been gifted in SHIELD HQ in Bogota. He didn't use much of it, always the least amount necessary. He was not known for luxury. Not that anyone else knew that.

He got a call on the cell phone even Alexander Pierce didn't know about. Monica.

A strange buzzing from the other room, a sound he hadn't heard in six years.

He answered the phone.

Seventeen year old Monica, sounding overjoyed: "Auntie Carol's back."

He rushed to the drawer where he'd left the beeper in as soon as he had finished getting settled in his room in Bogota. The distinctive red/blue/yellow hues of the modified Kree symbol glowed inside.

"Motherfucker," Fury said out loud.

Chapter End Notes

Much shorter chapter today but there will be a much longer one tomorrow, the longest one yet if I can get to it in time, where the vague outline I've had for a while is gonna begin to be useful because I need to make sure it all gets there the best it can get there.

Magnitron is indeed in the comics as well, though it served there (to my knowledge) as an alternate name for pre-movie Yon-Rogg as opposed to the suit he's now strapped
Frank Rambeau (originally the name was Maria's married name) is a minor character in the comics, but he makes a brief appearance as well. I did not want the trope of a bad parent any more than I had to, so while Frank isn't really characterized in the comics, I made him a nicer fella here so that we're not doing anything regressive with him.

Quite frankly, at this point it's moved from being speculation to just being my own fun and fancy free interpretation that will continue to try and stick to canon as long as it possibly can. So don't you worry, she's not gonna be around in MCU movies she wasn't around in.

This has grown to be a personal highlight of my day so thank you to you, if you're reading this, for giving me an outlet to improve my own day. We're all in this together and looking on the bright side can be insanely difficult at times, but it's easier when you know you're not alone out there.

- G
Reunited At Last

Chapter Summary

Carol recounts just exactly what she'd been up to after going through lightspeed, altering the fabric of space and time so she could have a fighting chance of finding the Skrulls a new home world. They're diverted by a couple of occurrences, one a potential threat, one a potential ally, and meetings with figures thought only to be legends, not ever expecting to see them again after that.

Only one more objective of a more personal nature to be taken care of after that...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Carol looked exactly the same.

Exactly. Like literally exactly. Same bemused smirk, hands defiantly on her hips, the only addition to her suit was this red sash and gold buckle she'd picked up somewhere, but otherwise exactly the same.

She'd paged Fury as soon as she had arrived back in the Terran system, but no response. She'd waited at least a day and then decided to track Maria and Monica down. Something might've happened to Fury like she suspected, and they didn't know about the beeper.

Mentally, she slapped herself for being in such a rush six years earlier that she didn't tell them about it.

She had seen the Kree sensor as soon as she re-entered the system. In the time that she had been gone, she very smartly decided not to bring the rest of the Skrulls with her. Only Talos, Soren and the Daughter had came with, in a much smaller Skrull ship they'd been able to find once they had reached the Tarnax system. With a proper jump and everything.

So now she stood in Monica's dorm at the University of New Orleans, Fury and Monica (not Maria) sitting at the table. Upon receiving the call from Monica, Fury also discovered a small ship outside of his window, cloaked. It had appeared just enough for Fury to spot Talos at the controls, and the two had burst into hysterical laughter, an emotional outburst Fury would never let anyone else at SHIELD see.

For the hell of it, he brought Goose onto the ship, which Talos was none too pleased with.

Talos and Soren weren't there (they were trying to find a covert place to park the ship), but the Daughter was, holding Goose in her lap.

Monica and the Daughter had been around the same age before, but now there was quite a gap. They looked a bit uncomfortable around each other as everyone else silently considered each other.

Finally Fury yelled "Where the hell have you been?"

Monica shushed him. "My roommate might be on vacation but you're not waking up the whole
building, Uncle Nick!"

Carol couldn't help but laugh at this. "Uncle Nick," she teased.

"Goddamn right I'm Uncle Nick. I've earned Uncle Nick. I've been doing your job for you."

"Lieutenant Trouble can take care of herself," Carol said, causing Monica to giggle as if she was a kid again. At this point, she ran into her Auntie Carol's arms and the two finally shared a proper hug. Despite being seventeen and being eager to be seen as mature, she didn't give a damn in that moment. Carol very absentmindedly and clumsily kissed her forehead, not really sure how else to show affection in Terran terms, but then proceeding to hold her close again as Fury continued to glare.

"You're not mad at me, Nicholas," Carol then said, causing Fury to glare and say back, "I'm about to be."

Still holding Monica, Carol shifted two of the wooden chairs in the kitchen together so they could both sit while embracing.

"I missed you, Fury."

At which Fury softened a little, despite his best efforts, and said back, "I missed you too."

"And I wasn't gone for this long intentionally. You did never hit that beeper. I did."

"You said only for emergencies."

"Sounded like you had one pretty recently."

"Those were people. I can't waste your time with people."

"I messed up."

Fury stopped. "What do you mean?"

"I left before really considering what the implications were. I made it sound as though I'd be gone for a few months. We didn't realize Mar-Vell's ship had no true jump capability and had to go to proper lightspeed in order to make it out of the systems before the Kree got back."

"In English."

"Space and time distort when you travel at the speed of light. You've got at least one Terran who talked about this right?"

"His name was Albert Einstein," said Monica helpfully.

"Great," said Carol, "so your Einstein prepared you for this. We went forward in time, essentially. Not on purpose, and not with any consistency, but I had to make a very hard choice."

Fury sighed quietly, still looking a bit distraught. "It's been a lonely few years, Carol."

"It has not, I was there!" Monica looked up from Carol's embrace, glaring at Fury.

"Not as lonely as it could've been, Monica, but still lonely."

"You don't look as though you needed my help."
"I didn't need your help fighting anyone, Carol."

The two of them looked down.

"Fury, I missed you dearly. It's been several months for me. I'm still getting used to Monica being this much older."

"We compiled your records so you can read them and remember everything, Auntie Carol."

Carol smiled at her. "Thank you. I'm not like famous here, right?"

"Not yet," said Fury sardonically, taking Goose back from the Daughter, who had spent the whole exchange silently staring and smiling at the whole procession, and began to quietly stroke his ears.

"He clawed out your eye and you pet him?"

"Yes, I do, because at least he's consistent with the clawing and won't unless I baby talk him too much."

"Hiya, Goose," said Carol.

Goose's jaws extended far wider than a normal cat and the tentacles that made up its true form burst out of its mouth, but only to wave at her before going back in and meowing as if nothing had happened.

"Good to see you, too."

At this point there was a loud thump on the window, making everyone except for Goose jump up a little, only to see Talos and Soren awkwardly knocking on the window.

"Disguise yourself!" Carol yelled at them.

"Piss off," yelled Talos back, as the Daughter ran over to open the window to let them in.

They both gave Monica a big hug, Fury another hug ("You're not at your fascist agency, mate, calm yourself," Talos had said), and Soren flicked Carol in the forehead, causing her to let out a surprised laugh, before they grabbed a couple chairs and sat down themselves.

"You're looking wonderful, young lady," Talos said, looking completely relaxed, "and so we've decided we're on vacation, officially, and that you're gonna show us around this lovely city."

Monica smiled back, "I dunno if that would be OK with Auntie Carol."

Soren said, "We need her permission?" and the room let out a tension relieving laugh again.

Till Carol said what everyone was hoping wouldn't be said: "Where's Maria?"

A long silence, till Fury said, "She's fine. She's at home. But she doesn't know you're here. You're taking the reigns on that one."

Carol said, in a strangely childlike voice: "Do I have to?"

Fury said, sounding even more paternal than usual: "Yes you do. I'm much older than you now, you can't say no."

Carol said: "I'll photon blast you."
Fury said, with a wink: "Try."

Carol said, without missing a beat: "Good thing you didn't use your other eye," and they both started laughing again.

They really hadn't spent very long on Titan, Carol thought later on.

They'd both entered the moon's surface, just her and Talos, and she was very surprised to see ruins everywhere. A very advanced civilization, by the looks of it.

"What was this place?"

"Not sure," said Talos slowly. "Or at least not for certain."

They had wandered around for a while. Perhaps Talos had just wanted to be alone with her for a while, the two of them commiserating over all the hard choices they had to make and would make.

"Us Skrulls never knew of them until they got the whole galaxy's attention. Suddenly they began warring with each other, but it wasn't so much of a war as it was a mass slaughter."

Carol said nothing. She just observed all the carnage.

"There's only one left, so I heard. The instigator of the carnage. And he's very worth keeping track of. It was worth keeping track of his movements because he's the other thing that might pose a real threat to us right now. And to you."

"What's his name?"

Talos shrugged. "He's called Thanos. Real ugly bastard. Kills half of a planet's population, leaves. Claims on holo-net reports that it's best for the universe, that he's giving each civilization a chance to preserve resources. Load of malarkey, really."

Carol asked: "Why is that?"

Talos said: "A population grows. They're always worse off. You've got half a population who has lost everything they treasured and they fall into even greater ruin in the end. Such a goddamn waste. If he found us, he'd kill half of us. For right now, I don't think we'd be worth his energy since there's so few of us. But if our numbers grow enough, he might turn his forces on us. Worth thinking about."

Carol said: "I'll kick his ass."

Talos said, laughing: "Not likely. You're strong as shit, love, but he makes that fleet you stood up to look like nothing. You want to take him down, you'll have to train a lot more. But I wanted you to be aware of him, someone with as unusual as a path as yourself. Be aware that he's the thing to be feared of in this galaxy, and if you face off with him, you will most certainly lose."

He clapped her on the back and said, "So try to lose for a good reason, eh?" And kept going, wandering around away from her, leaving her alone with her thoughts. They'd stayed for several hours, observing the pointless carnage of it all. The hypocrisy of it all.

"Why does nobody stand up to him?" She asked once they were back on the ship.

"Oh, people always claim it's not their problem. In our case, we have no choice. But a civilization
as large as the Xandarians feel as though the Whoever's getting killed, not their problem. Take care of their own first. Sooner or later, he'll set his attention onto them, and then they'll be the ones grieving and broken while he leaves, feeling like a martyr."

He laughed ruefully and said, "you chose two really powerful enemies to inevitably face. Only thing as strong as Thanos that I know of is the Supreme Intelligence and you barely made it out against that."

Carol said: "We should just convince this Thanos to kill the Supreme Intelligence. But then he'd try to kill everything else."

Talos said: "Perhaps. Don't know how that would work. But there's more pressing matters at hand, because we'll need to take the jump very soon. We've detected Kree on our radar. They haven't spotted us yet. But we stay in this system long enough, they will."

Luckily, the Kree never did notice them. They were close enough that they saw them in the asteroid belt that surrounded the whole system, closest to the last planet in the Terran system. But they had come purely to check and see if they were still there, and if they'd waited much longer, it would've been game over. Carol was too drained to put up a fight for long and the ship itself had no offensive capabilities.

They had to leave. So they did. Carol watching the years literally drain by, but having no effect on anyone on board. She held back her tears as the Daughter sat next to her, looking more sad than she ever saw her. She hoped Fury and Maria and Monica were OK.

But everything else had, more or less, gone smoothly enough. A group of Skrull refugees and a Terran were accepted readily by the Xandarian government, and they negotiated a price for the components they needed by selling some of the artifacts on board that Mar-Vell had taken for such purposes, so they could finance their way to wherever they went.

Carol did not let on any more that she was a Terran dressed in a modified Kree suit, and after meeting with Nova Prime, who effectively ran the security for the planet called Nova Corps (Carol had heard of them, as Kree enemies, but never met them in person), she was more or less given free reign of the place with good reason.

The Skrulls and Carol were assigned to a Nova Corps member called Rhomann Dey, who was sent mainly to keep track of them and also get whatever info on the Kree they could provide, which they did readily. Carol didn't say much during these interviews, having never visited a planet other than C-53 for a reason that didn't involve killing the indigenous population. Rhomann was nice enough, if a bit dorky, though the Daughter seemed to get on well with his own child upon introducing them all to his wife and child.

In the interest of security, Nova Prime did not let news of Carol get out to anyone, though she certainly made a public impression wearing the modified Kree suit. She stopped wearing it during the weeks she was on Xandar, resorting to some of the local attire and exploring some of the sights to be found. Despite how badly she missed Fury and Monica and Maria and wondering if they'd since died (they'd figured out that almost six Terran years had gone by in the single desperate lightspeed jump, which was much better than everyone aboard had honestly been expecting), she tried to keep her spirits up as Talos and Soren negotiated the purchase of the components and got help from some local Xandarian mechanics to install them on the ship.

Rhomann, largely assigned only to them, gave Carol and the Daughter the grand tour of the main city, along with his wife and daughter. The two children ran around the city, chasing each other and playing games, as Carol and Rhomann largely were off on their own. Rhomann was interesting
enough to talk to, but they didn't connect very much. But he was polite and friendly and eager to offer info Carol wanted, which in turn was about the Kree, unbiased and unfiltered.

She got as much. Kree experimentation on Terrans was not unusual, as it turned out. There was a whole group of them somewhere, though the Xandarian records weren't shown. But they'd experimented on lots of similar races in order to figure out a way to create a group of warriors they could use if their numbers got too low. As far as Carol could tell, she had accidentally became one of these things herself, referred to in the Kree tongue and written language as "Inhuman."

The final puzzle piece to be solved was the word "Xorrian." The only answer she could find was a myth of a creator race that had spawned all others, how multiple "species" could reproduce with one another. Xorrian seemed to be the word the Xandarians attributed to that creator race, that Kree, Terrans, Skrulls, Centaurians, Asgardians, Xandarians, however many others, all came from, all intentionally spawned from their own genetic structure, but there was no real answer as to why.

Finally the parts were more or less in place and they could leave within a few days. This was when Rhomann, looking very confused and nervous, arrived in Carol's quarters alone to tell her that her presence had been requested by a source who did not show up very often on Xandar, and had requested to speak with her alone. This presence did not arrive here mainly to talk to her, but had overheard through Nova Prime that a strange Terran who had been assimilated into the Kree and then broken free of their control was on the planet, trying to find a way to reach the Tarnax system.

Carol found this surprising as well, because she'd spent the past several weeks also looking up the books on Terrans the Xandarians had (quite a few, lots of scholars liked to sneak over to C-53 and steal their literature as a challenge, though it was comically simple).

So she'd gone over their myths, because Kree mythology had always interested in her, and as she read the Terran myths, one about fellows called the Greeks and some more called the Romans and Aztecs and Egyptians, and she'd spent some time trying to memorize all the names. Suddenly, one of those names was abruptly listed to her and she remembered it from one of the Terran books and nothing made sense anymore.

One of them, two of them actually, somehow were asking to speak with her?

Rhomann's response was: "Yes, it's the same ones, they get that all the time."

"How the fuck is Norse mythology real?" Fury yelled from across the table, causing Monica to flinch and shush him.

"Uncle Nick, please don't wake up the rest of my dorm."

Carol, Talos and Soren, for their part, could not stop laughing.

It had all come back, that part of it anyway. Carol as a kid had really liked myths, old and new.

So by the time she was ushered into the Nova Corps conference room, to see a very regal looking old man with a gold plate over one eye (much like Fury, she noted) and an even more regal-looking woman, that was the shock to end all shocks.

She wore her Kree suit to look somewhat distinguished herself, though she was also taken aback to see two others in the room, one of them blonde and brawny, the other with dark hair and much
shorter than herself, eyes shifting across the room.

"Let me see the hammer, I'm bored," said the shorter one.

"You're not worthy," the blonder and brawnier one quipped in response, twirling a large hammer round his wrist with a leather strap attached to the end of it.

Carol smirked at this, causing them both to look up. The old man with the missing eye barely had time to raise a hand before suddenly the very blonde and brawny one was in front of her, arms crossed but in a way that they were flexing much more than normal.

Carol could admire the commitment to fitness, but was unsure what the point of that was. Competition, maybe? Her muscles were smaller and she could live with that. As Monica had stated to her before she'd left in a strange voice, "size matters not."

"Why hello there, who must you be?" The brawny one said, smiling wide at her, holding the hammer like a child holds a comfort blanket.

"Carol," Carol said. Whether she used the Kree or Terran name, the Supreme Intelligence knew both of them.

Wait a minute, they were in the books too, weren't they?

"Brother, calm thyself," the short one said angrily from his corner of the room.

"Enough," said the old man with the eye patch, who had by now sat down. The sight of this regal looking figure in a conference chair was quite a silly one, so Carol couldn't help but smile.

The old man smiled back. "I am Odin, this is Frigga, and these are my two sons, Thor and Loki."

"And you must be the lovely Carol," the one called Thor abruptly said, still smiling the wide smile and still flexing and holding the hammer, clearly an important phallic symbol to him. How similar this might be to the Terran obsession with phallic symbols, that was something that would be worth asking someone later on.

"Yeah, I just told you," Carol said, sitting down across the table from Odin and Frigga, who seemed entirely unconcerned.

"We're the gods of your people," said the one called Loki, sitting at the opposite end of the table, as far away from everyone else as he could possibly get, while Thor sat right next to Carol, causing her to side-eye him and shift her chair ever so slightly away from him.

"I don't worship you," Carol said in response, causing Loki to laugh.

"Why do you need to? Worship suggests the possibility that we never existed. I've kept track of so many of your gods and as it turns out, the ones currently being worshipped don't exist at all."

Carol said: "I don't really decide that. Why am I here?"

Frigga said: "My sons have to learn manners. As the representative of Earth, we figured it was proper to make a proper introduction now that your kind has ascended to the stars."

Carol said: "What's Earth?"

Odin said: "Your planet? Where you're from?"
Carol laughed and said: "Oh, that. Planet C-53. Didn't realize it had a name."

Odin laughed too, uncomfortably, and said: "You didn't know?"

Frigga said: "She used to be Kree, my love."

Odin said: "Ah, yes! I thought it was unusual that they'd choose one who was Kree to be their representative. I suppose that even if they didn't choose you, here you are so you must be."

"How could I possibly be the representative if they didn't choose me. I arrived here with Skrulls, you know that right?"

"You'd make such a wonderful representative, if you don't mind me saying so," Thor said, still flexing with the hammer, curled up in the chair and leaning over a little too close for Carol's liking.

"Brother, stop kissing arse," Loki said from his side of the room. Carol wasn't sure which one she disliked more: the overbearing one with no personal boundaries or the one that sneered across the room like he owned the place. Bad parenting, she concluded, but figured since they were called gods in the books, she probably shouldn't start an actual fight with them.

"Well, even so, it's unusual for a people as primitive as yourselves to be here, so you must be a particularly advanced one of them."

"I appreciate that, Mr. Odin--"

"Just Odin will be fine, my dear."

"I appreciate that, Odin, but I wouldn't call myself advanced so much as in very unusual circumstances."

"Regardless, you're as close to one as they have, and we used to spend a lot of time down there, so it is worth checking in and see how the people of Earth have fared since we left them all those years ago."

"Haven't had a chance to check in with the maidens myself, but they certainly had high praise, if you catch my drift." Then it clicked for Carol, and she wished she could be even more oblivious than she usually was, because now Thor's intentions were perfectly clear.

"Brother!" Loki whined, which made Carol almost imperceptibly smile at this, watching someone hundreds of years older than her act even more immature than Monica, who herself was at an age when that was allowed.

"Thor, Loki, both of you, calm down," Frigga said with a strange sense of authority that suddenly made them both immediately shut up the second before things were going to escalate further. It looked as though they were both about to leap the table at each other.

All Carol could think was: "Oh god, did this Terran god just try to make a pass at me?"

She could appreciate his physique in the objective way that she could appreciate Yon-Rogg, in the sense that they committed fully to their fitness and staying healthy for combat, but in that sense, not even remotely what she was interested in. She wondered what she was interested in exactly, got a sudden uncomfortable image of Maria in her mind, realized it wasn't Maria that made her uncomfortable but the strange feeling she got thinking of her, and decided now was not the time to think of Maria at all.
"Apologize," she heard Frigga snap at them both, as they whined and moaned about having been talked down to by anyone.

"I'm sorry my brother is being an arse to you and trying to have carnal knowledge of you," Loki said with a sneer, and then when nobody responded to that, "it's a Terran term, I thought she'd get it."

"I'm sorry," Thor said, "that you'll never get to experience the orgasmic wonder that is the immense size of my--"

"That's enough!" Loki yelled and suddenly Carol let out a yelp as the edge of the hammer hit her squarely in the cheek as Thor flew past her, across the table, colliding with Loki and the two rolling on a heap on the ground, punching each other wildly and screaming.

She was so surprised that the massive bruise already forming from the hammer didn't hurt nearly as much as she expected, save for the cheek beginning to swell. She'd had just enough time to put up the photon energy around her so that the wound was minimized, a second sooner and he would've probably killed her.

So all Carol did was stare in silent confusion as these two gods wrestled on the floor of the conference room, Thor repeatedly bashing Loki in the head with the hammer and somehow barely leaving a scratch. It was like if he hit him with a blade of grass.

Frigga just sighed in quiet exasperation. "Give it another twenty years or so and they'll finally be out of puberty," she said before leaning over to Carol and whispering, "Asgardians in puberty are so unbearable, don't you agree?"

Carol said, a bit numb: "They don't make passes at you once they're fully grown, right?"

Frigga let out a hearty laugh at this: "Oh we don't have the sorts of hangups the Terrans do about that. We just ask. Though Thor absolutely has to learn how to ask respectfully, he's used to using his fame and glory to not have to ask." She said then, impressed: "you're the first to refuse him in a very long time, longer than your lifespan, so he's not used to the word 'no,' period."

"I can only imagine," was all Carol could say as Loki squealed not so differently from one of the strange beings that were near Maria's house, that rooted around in the mud and ate scraps, that she'd called "pigs". This would've been funny if it hadn't been happening to her.

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"That's really gross," Monica said quietly as soon as Carol relayed that bit of information.

"It is?" Carol said, eyes widening, looking back at her.

"You don't think so?"

"I mean," Carol said with an awkward cough, "That's not a thing the Kree are allowed to do, really. So to have this man ask me so brazenly and do all that was very odd."

Fury was on the floor, silently vibrating with laughter. Talos was right next to him, doing the same, as Soren just sighed in exasperation.

"Boys," she said, looking with annoyed affection at her immature husband.

"Oh, it's a boy thing?" Talos said, rising to his feet again while the middle-aged Fury giggled like a
child. "Are gender roles really that set in stone? You're telling me if I identified as a woman or something different, still boys?"

He sat down next to Soren, still laughing a little, and put an arm around her. "That's not what I meant. You're being an ass."

"Ass?"

"Terran word. I like using it."

"Yes, but what if I wasn't a boy?"

"Don't be insensitive. You identify as a boy. I'm teasing you. Don't make this into a thing."

Fury sat up and said: "Wait, what the hell do you mean, identifying as a boy? He's a boy. I mean, a man."

"Uncle Nick," Monica said sardonically, "You have so much to learn. You ought to take classes with me."

"Like hell I will," said Uncle Nick. "And you're the only one who gets to call me Nick."

Soren turned to the Daughter and said sweetly, "you know that if you ever decide to identify as something different, we will accept you no matter what you turn out to be, because we want you exactly as you are?"

The Daughter smiled and nodded enthusiastically, then turned to Carol expectantly.

Carol, who had no idea what they were going on about, but decided she would ask Monica later, said "Yes, of course. I love you."

The Daughter smiled and hugged Carol for that sentiment.

Monica said: "so Auntie Carol, you didn't have sex with the Norse god?"

Fury, almost to his feet, fell over laughing again.

Carol said: "First of all, the last person I want to talk to about sex with is you. Second of all," and she grimaced, "No. Ew. That wasn't even remotely the point of all of this."

Fury said, on the floor: "Well, they sound strong as hell. How much do we pay them to get them to work for us?"

After several silent seconds, the two of them finally stopped hitting each other and now sat panting, side by side, against the wall of the conference room, staring up at Carol, as if for approval for what they did.

Carol just squinted in confusion at both of them in response, because this was sure as hell not how her day was supposed to go.

"Anyway, we'd love to have you over to Asgard sometime to get the lay of the land. We like getting to know the representatives of each nation, and it seems that considering your unique status as the only Terran with access to Xandar, it might as well be you."
"I'm not so sure," Carol said, not looking at Odin at all, "I have prior engagements. I promised the Skrulls I would find them a homeworld to settle on and to rebuild from what the Kree did to them."

"Well," said Frigga, "we could actually be of service with that."

"How so?" Carol asked, turning to her and arching an eyebrow.

"We have our own method of transport that is a lot cheaper than what your ship currently possesses."

"What's the catch?" Carol asked, the eyebrow still prominently arched.

"The catch, as you put it, is that we have problems of our own that aren't so easily solved."

"I can fight anything that threatens Asgard, mother!" Thor yelled from his panting on his side of the room, causing Loki to hit him in the ribs, then Thor hitting him back, then the two looking ready to pounce again if not for a severe look from Frigga.

"Matters in which we do not want our presence to be known," Odin said, with a degree of finality to his voice, "And neither of you are known for being subtle, you know this."

Thor and Loki, two children in grown bodies as it seemed, put down their heads looking thoroughly disappointed. Carol suspected it had more to do with their seemingly perpetual bickering than any opportunity at altruism.

"And you need someone from Earth."

"Not from Earth, but with your particular talents, that makes you very potentially useful to us."

"How about this?" Carol asked, the eyebrow finally lowering, "Take us to where we need, and I'll come visit Asgard, I'll look at the lay of the land, as you put it, and I'll be more willing to hear your terms and more willing to accept them."

"And what do we get for our charity?" Odin asked.

"They'll be growing crops and resources, won't they? Tarnax is rich in such metallic nutrients, that I know. Very valuable minerals that the whole galaxy is killing for. Imagine if this Asgard got first access to them."

Odin and Frigga, royal as they may be, shared a very hungry expression at this wording.

"After all," Carol said, "It would hardly be fitting for a nation so dedicated to diplomacy to take it by force. If any nation dared mess with the Skrulls, you better believe they'd have me to reckon with, and the Xandarians wouldn't like it either, and that's not something any nation can really afford right now."

Frigga said: "Is that a threat?"

Carol said: "It's a threat to any nation that doesn't want to play fair. You're just hearing it first. But I'd rather you be sold to than the Kree."

Odin said, his one remaining eye growing cold: "No deal." And he and Frigga began to arrange their robes and pull themselves out of their chairs in order to leave. Carol, internally, felt sort of bad that things had degraded so much, but not so much that she was going to stop them and reconsider. She knew they were trying to guilt her into accepting a worse deal.
Thor, incensed, came around the table, holding his hammer out, no longer bothering to flex, not seeing her as a potential conquest anymore but as a threat to his father. "You'd best not threaten the Asgardian people, Carol of Earth," he said, trying to look as menacing as possible but not really doing much of it. "You see, you might be all high and mighty, with your powers granted to you by that farcical group of maniacs called the Kree, but you are no match for Asgardian metal and divine birthright."

And he abruptly handed her the hammer. It was quite heavy, very much so, but it got slightly lighter after a few moments and she simply stared at it, very confused. What would giving her the hammer accomplish?

"So what?" Carol said. "It's very nice?"

The four of them stared at her in complete and total shock. "Is he not supposed to let others touch it?"

"How did you do that?" Odin practically squealed from across the table, holding onto it for dear life, damn near fainting with how much he seemed to be panicking. Frigga had the most measured response but even she looked baffled as all hell.

"How did I do what?"

"How are you holding it?"

"Around the handle?"

Thor had fallen over onto his ass, both hands over his mouth. Loki looked stunned too, but eventually he began to laugh hysterically, pounding the ground as hard as he could, cracking the floor. "She's worthy! I can't believe it! That trick usually works!"

"Worthy of what?"

"That's my hammer!" Thor yelled out, increasingly sounding like a child. "And only I'm worthy of it! My father said so!"

"It's not just you, you idiot!" Odin yelled at him, "It's anyone that could be worthy and I assumed it would only be you and I!"

"You assumed?" Thor practically squawked back him, and the two of them began to yell incoherently at each other until Nova Prime and Rhomann came running in.

"What the hell is going on?" Nova Prime yelled herself, before noticing the hammer and saying "Oh, nicely done."

"You're not surprised?" Odin yelled at Nova Prime.

"I mean, I am," she said, much more calm now that she figured it out, "But it was bound to happen eventually, with how often your son loves to pull that trick on people."

"What trick?" Carol asked.

"Hand it to me," Rhomann said, and when she did so, the hammer suddenly fell to the floor with a loud thump, causing Thor to clap his hands and begin laughing again. "You see? Maybe it was a fluke, hammers can have flukes!"
Carol frowned. It had been heavy, but she hadn't had to use the photon energy at all to hold on. Had to flex and grit herself a bit, and her arm was already sore, but Rhomann was in good shape, too. Made no sense.

Nova Prime, gamely, tried to pick it up herself, and neither of them could. Even Frigga, trying to appease her son, tried to lift it and it only budged a little bit in response.

"Now you try," Thor demanded, still sounding so grossly childlike to Carol that she only obeyed to spite him.

The hammer lifted up again, with the same amount of effort.

"Me-dammit!" Thor yelled and slammed both hands down onto the desk, cracking it in two.

"I can't believe he said 'me-dammit,'" Fury said, holding his sides and leaning against Talos for support so he wouldn't fall over again.

"It was so dumb," Carol said, still not entirely believing this farce of a day had happened only a few weeks earlier.

"Would I be worthy?" Monica said, face shining wide with adoration.

Carol reached out with a hand and bumped her on the nose with a finger. "Of course you would be, Lieutenant Trouble."

That was all it took. No exceptions, no asks, no catch, Odin and Frigga agreed to send Heimdall, the keeper of the Rainbow Bridge, to the hangar their ship was contained in so it could be directly transported with everyone inside to the Tarnax system.

The jumps by themselves would've distorted them and left them deeply sick for a while, but with this, it would be instantaneous and painless, and the Skrulls were still dumbfounded that Carol had gotten them this much for nothing, by complete and total accident.

Frigga had asked to see Carol again before she left, just the two of them.

She'd gone, to see Frigga and the hammer exactly where Carol had dropped it as soon as Odin had promised his help for nothing in return and both Thor and Loki threw a fit and stormed out of the room.

"My boys are still growing, and their behavior was unacceptable," Frigga said as soon as she entered.

"You say that often?"

"I don't have to see them in public settings often," Frigga said, "so I am spoiled in that way."

"Why don't you knock sense into them?"

"Oh, I've tried. I still try. They seem limitless in their hunger and ambition. But it'll even out. Thor, at least, will learn humility and you'll grow to like him when you see him again. Not in that way, of course, but you'll grow to respect him."
Carol smirked, "no offense, but I have no intention of seeing him again for any reason."

Frigga smiled warmly. "I know. I can't say how I know, but I know you will see him again, and you have to know for when you see him again, but I can't explain or it won't happen."

Carol arched her eyebrow again, imitating Soren as her only frame of reference. "Can you tell the future or something?"

Frigga kept on smiling. "In a way. It doesn't excuse hundreds of years of hurtful behavior, and he's treated others far worse than he treated you today, Carol. He'll never be able to make up for that. It'll be one of his greatest regrets."

"How do you know that?"

Frigga shrugged, looking a little teary-eyed. "He told me. He wasn't supposed to, but he did."

Carol sat down in one of the remaining chairs. "I don't understand my place in any of this."

Frigga sat down next to her, looking more regal and wise than ever. "You're not meant to save the universe, Carol Danvers. You are not the chosen one, you are not destined to be the single person the universe relies on to keep itself intact," her smile grew wider, "but you're going to have a part to play, you'll be one of many. You'll know when you see them. It's going to be so wonderful."

"I don't understand." Without the men, who she honestly couldn't stand at this point, Frigga was so much easier to talk to.

"I'm trying to tell you without affecting the outcome. So you're at least a little prepared. There's so much that's going to happen, so much I wasn't supposed to know, and it's eating me up inside. Thor mentioned you. He mentioned a lot of people. I've never forgotten the names, and you're the first one of them I've encountered."

Carol put her head in her hands, massaging her temple with her fingers. "I'm a Terran who was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"Every other outcome, every other time I've tried to tell more, it hasn't ended well. I can tell, in my own way, if it ends the best way it's meant to end. There are fourteen million, six hundred and five scenarios. There is only one where everything ultimately works out to some degree, where the universe can survive just enough to keep on going. I keep trying to figure out how to stay in that one so my son has a chance to be happy, because that's my happiness. He might be a bad person, but he's going to be a bad person who, like you, is going to do some good eventually."

"I'm a bad person too, Mrs. Frigga--"

"Frigga."

"Frigga, I've killed a lot of people. I've killed a lot of Skrulls. I'm trying to make up for all the bad I did. I don't deserve forgiveness."

"This isn't about forgiveness, Carol Danvers. This isn't about good or evil. Those are luxurious words to possess. Those are the luxuries of the people who don't have to get involved. Sooner or later, everyone will have to get involved. Those two words will be replaced with two other words: life and death. That's a much easier choice, no matter what kind of person you are."

Carol sighed and nodded. "I guess so."
"By the time you get there, you'll be ready. You'll have a part to play. You won't get much of a
reward, other than the universe continuing to exist and the worst elements of it excised from
existence. It has to be at a particular time or else it won't work. So many have to die in order for it
to work. It's such a cruel reality the two of us face."

"But the Supreme Intelligence--"

"I've heard of it. The Supreme Intelligence is arrogant enough to think it's the most threatening
lifeform in this universe, and it's wrong, and it'll pay dearly for it. Prepare yourself for what comes
next. You'll know it as soon as you see it. And after this one out of millions scenario, there will be
plenty left to do. You'll never stop fighting. Want to make up for all the wrong you've done,
knowingly or otherwise? That's what you dedicate your life to. You dedicate all the time you have
left to making the universe better than when you entered. No matter who you were before, Carol
Danvers."

"I don't know how I can believe you. I don't know how to take all this. I barely know you. I just
met you, I don't--"

"Carol," Frigga said very forcefully, causing her to look up at her. She held Thor's hammer with no
effort at all in her hand, smiling wider than ever at her, it looked like she was carrying a feather.

"But--"

"Thor, as of right now, thinks only he and you can hold it. He's even more wrong than he knows."
She smiled and placed the hammer back down on the floor, but not before a voice rang out,
sounding small and afraid for how deep it was.

"I already knew you could hold it, Mother, you don't have to pretend."

Thor stood at the doorway of the room. Odin and Nova Prime stood outside, closer to the exit,
chatting near a man Carol didn't recognize, wearing a suit of armor with horns and a strange
scepter. Loki in turn stood away from everyone else, muttering to himself, giving envious looks in
Thor's direction and a somewhat softer look at Frigga.

Frigga shrugged and lifted up the hammer again. "Well, that I didn't know," she said to Carol, "life
can still be so full of surprises even after you learn as much as I have." She handed it back to Thor,
who despite his height still looked immensely small in the door frame.

She patted Carol on the shoulder absentmindedly, and to Carol's surprise she didn't mind it. "Come
back to Asgard sometime, Carol. Please come and visit me. Take a look around, see the sights.
When you have a chance."

"OK," Carol said, very uncharacteristically lost for words.

She smiled, reached out, and took Carol's cheek in her hand, catching the two others by surprise.
The look she gave her then was so maternal, so loving, so warm, something clicked in Carol's
mind, a burning desire that she'd have a parent who treated her like this, and then the moment was
gone and Frigga moved her hand away, still smiling at her.

"You're going to be amazing," she said.

Frigga handed the hammer back to Thor as she went by to join her husband and Nova Prime. Thor
continued to stand there, causing Loki in the background to give confused looks between the two
of them.
"I have nothing to say to you," Carol said, feeling very tired by the day despite not having exerted herself in any way.

Thor did not move. Strangely, she was able to read him in that moment, reading the apology in his eyes, and she could at least understand why people kept on giving him chances he probably did not deserve. If she hadn't dealt with Yon-Rogg for so long, she might have even allowed him to say it.

She did not. She did not have patience for such petty concerns when so much was at stake. Terran god or not, there were so many bigger fish to fry, a Terran expression she had learned from Maria that she had grown to enjoy using in times like these.

"Actually," she said, raising a finger, "I do."

"Yes?" Thor asked, looking extremely hopeful that she might let him off the hook for his earlier rudeness.

"You're going to need to grow up very fast, Terran god," she said, smiling at him sweetly, "because there may be a time that I'm going to need you around and I can't have you lollygagging about."

She'd learned that one from Monica, a particular favorite of hers.

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"I did say that a lot, didn't I?" Monica scrunched up her nose with her chin on her hands, no one laughing any longer, everyone giving Carol their full attention. Fury looked impressed, but Talos and Soren, who had already heard all this, still gave her a look of complete and total affection, which was unusual. She wasn't used to being accepted like this by everyone.

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The group entered the hangar, where the remainder of the Skrulls were packing the ships full of the supplies they needed. Talos had already been informed that their passage was now going to be much faster than originally anticipated, with none of the side effects.

The Skrulls didn't look nearly as impressed by the proceedings as Carol had, considering that they had dealt with Asgardians before.

Their reaction seemed to be strangely cordial compared to how they reacted to the Xandarians. Talos and Soren were both cold and aloof to Odin and Frigga, barely even acknowledged the two sons (to the extent that both of them somehow commiserated in this and complained loudly about it in earshot of the other Skrulls, as if this would change anything). They were the most pleasant with the armored man with the scepter, called Heimdall, and it seems as though he and Talos casually knew each other.

They did lighten up, however, upon learning that Carol had been able to hold the hammer.

"Fucking finally, mate," Talos said happily to her, clapping her on the back so hard she almost fell over, "Every damn time we've encountered that oaf, he always finds the one of us who hasn't met him before and gives them the hammer. He's done it to me and he tried to make a pass at Soren."

"How did she react?" Carol asked.

"His nether regions were in the same place as mine," said Soren cheerfully, "so it had the same effect when I put my foot there."

Carol stared at her, shocked. Soren only shrugged, and Carol burst out laughing, holding her sides,
leaning over because she could barely hold herself up, the image of Thor writhing in pain on the ground tickled her funny bone something fierce.

"What are you laughing about?" They all turned, Carol still laughing, to see Loki materialize, leaning against the entry ramp to the ship. Carol calmed herself, Talos glared, but Soren smiled sweetly.

"We were speaking of the time I injured your brother's groin," said Soren.

"Ah," said Loki, "that was a wonderful memory. You'll forever have my thanks and my favor for that."

"What favor is that?" said Soren.

"Well," said Loki, "When I take a kingdom of my own, yours will not be included."

Now Carol stopped laughing. It was the first time Loki had properly conveyed a sense of danger to them, though from her own experience she could see him as just another little man trying to assert dominance. But this man was much stronger than a Terran.

"Wise of you," said Soren, her tone not changing at all. "Skrulls can change their appearance, as you know. What you don't know is that we can also tell if anyone else has. Since you're so fond of that," she noted, still smiling, "keep that in mind."

"Hmmph," said Loki.

And that was that. The rest had gone by pretty uneventfully. Tarnax really had been abandoned. There were only so many sensors the Kree could put around the system, all it took was Heimdall gleefully destroying most of them (and making sure the Kree saw him, as he knew they wouldn't dare make war against the Asgardians) to have them slip inside.

The planet was lush and rich with life. The Skrulls all cheered as the thousands of them that had assembled poured out onto the planet's surface, but Carol was not cheering. As much as it pleased her to see the Skrulls back home, she needed to go back.

And so she did.

For the first time in six years, Yon-Rogg contacted the Supreme Intelligence.

"Let me after her."

"No." Vers said. She still took the form of Vers to taunt him even after all this time.

"You made me into this. Let me after her."

"No," Vers said again. "She'll be expecting you. She is a minor inconvenience and she'll be taken out like one."

Monica lay asleep on the couch. Carol had to carry her after the conversation finally finished. Talos and Soren had retreated to the small Skrull ship they'd brought along for the four of them,
the Daughter went with them.

Leaving only Fury, Carol and Goose wide awake.

"Aren't you expected back in Bogota, Agent Fury?" Carol said, eyebrow raised. She felt more like herself again now that she didn't have to put on airs for Monica's sake. They were falling back into the old groove they'd had when they first became friends.

But Fury only smiled sadly, seemed like the last six years had taken a lot out of him. He wasn't quite as jokey as before, she'd noticed, which she deeply missed but also couldn't blame him for losing. His head was shaved now, and he'd grown a clipped and trimmed beard, and now sported an eye patch over the missing eye that Goose had taken. He looked so different now. He had visibly aged.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there," she said finally.

"Don't be," said Fury, who had begun to sip on a mug of coffee no matter what anyone else tried to say in order to dissuade him.

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"You made a promise to them and you kept it. For you, it's been a proper amount of time. You were in desperate circumstances."

"I know," Carol said, feeling twice as small as Thor did in that room on Xandar.

"I'm not mad at you," he said, "I don't resent you, I don't hold anything against you. I know it took you this long because you took this long, and that you'd never skip out without a good reason. But that doesn't mean I didn't miss you, dearly."

Tears were welling up in Fury's one good eye as he continually stroking Goose with his other hand. Carol could relate, she sure as hell didn't let most people see her cry, either. She didn't cry, though. She was far too tired. As much as she was soothed by no longer missing Fury and Monica as much, now that they were right there, it had only been replaced with missing Maria.

"You gotta be Tough Guy Fury at work, huh?" She said sympathetically.

"Don't we both have to be tough at work?" Fury said, cracking a small smile. "You think I'm gonna let that kiss-ass Coulson see that Nicholas Joseph Fury has a beating heart? Please. My work requires me to have no heart, just like yours."

Carol shrugged. "The Skrulls aren't nearly as weird about it as Terrans, I guess."

"I missed Talos and Soren too. Bastards. Why do I only make friends with people who can almost never be here?"

They shared a glance, and Fury had always been the better of the two of them at reading between the lines, and he said what Carol had both wanted him desperately to say and hoping desperately he wouldn't say it at all.

"You need to go see Maria."

"Where will you be?"

"I'll be here. I promised Monica I'd spend the day with her. You will too."
"Of course. Should I get Talos?"

"No," Fury said smiling. "You ought to do it yourself."

Carol smiled back. She actually hadn't properly flown in quite a while, at least not on the surface of a planet.

"What if they see me?"

"SHIELD protocol requires me to say that shooting stars are not a basis to call emergency services. That reminds me, there's one more group of folks you ought to see after, before you get back here."

"Who's that?"

"Your folks. Maria's got the records compiled. That'll hopefully jog your memory for good."

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Maria slept. She worried too often. Sleep was her only real refuge these days. Apart with times with Nick (he secretly let her call him that), time with Monica, even time with Frank. They spoke quite often these days. She suspected Frank had always wanted to rekindle things, but she didn't need him for that. He was with a fellow firefighter now anyway, and they seemed happy, and as much as his new partner seemed to worry about his friendship with his ex-wife, she at least seemed accepting. She seemed nervous about the idea of being a potential mother to Monica (they'd met a couple times and got along, but Monica seemed to scare her).

She thought about everyone else so she wouldn't think about Carol. She'd thought about Carol every night since she vanished, and she thought about her now, in her sleep, every night since she had voluntarily left. Carol had warned it might be a while, that she had no idea what to expect out there, that she might be killed. Maria was almost certain she wasn't dead. Unless the Kree had gotten to her. Unless the Skrulls were up to no good and tricked her. Unless some other alien bad guy out there. So many possibilities, so many---

The night light needed to be replaced. She groaned and opened her eyes. Damn thing was supposed to help you sleep. She'd specifically gotten it because it reminded her of Carol's photon glow, which in the few weeks she'd gotten to see it, really made her feel safer and more secure than anything had made her felt. But it hadn't really helped. She still had so much trouble sleeping and--

The night light was on the opposite side she was lying.

She realized that and looked up through the window. The glow was only getting brighter. Quite bright.

Her hands went to her mouth, she practically fell out of bed to run to the window and look out.

It got brighter still, and she realized in a second who it was, and she wasn't sleepy anymore.

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What Maria hadn't noticed before running outside in her pajamas was that it was raining quite hard. She didn't care.

Carol, soaking wet from the rain, hair over her eyes and awkwardly trying to push it back, still glowing, landed right as Maria burst outside, slipping on the dirt, getting her socks coated with it,
not even remotely caring. She ran as fast as she could at Carol screaming tears of joy, thanking every god that might exist that she lived far from her neighbors so they wouldn't hear her yell.

She'd always preferred privacy.

Carol hadn't really anticipated Maria's reaction, she'd been too nervous to see her again after all this. Months for her, years for Maria.

She was scared Maria would slap her, or whatever Terrans did when they felt betrayed by the amount of time that someone had left them alone, and regretted watching all those dumb projections of stories with Monica before leaving the last time.

But instead, Maria ran at her as fast as she could.

Carol instinctively stuck out her arms to block herself off and said "hey" very awkwardly.

Maria ran through them, right into her arms, wrapping them around her, sobbing and screaming with joy.

She pressed her mouth against Carol's mouth, and Carol very awkwardly tried to reciprocate, but it honestly didn't matter in that moment, or who saw them, or what anyone thought, because the only thing on both their minds was each other.

Chapter End Notes

Our longest chapter yet! It wasn't supposed to be this long, but then I got so into it that I'd written a bit more than I'd expected which is why it's so long and up so comparatively late. I had tried playing D&D this morning but had gotten such an awful headache (I figured out why so hopefully that won't happen again), so I'd needed something to do to distract myself and so I spent more time writing than I usually do.

And the introduction of you-know-who was mainly done for one particularly comic moment that felt like something out of Looney Tunes that I imagined separately and then had to see, mainly because it's fun to imagine the Asgardians as big impervious children for centuries at a time. So I do wholeheartedly apologize to any Thor fans but to be fair, this is a pre-movie Thor and Ragnarok is one of my all-time favorites! He and the rest of his kin have a lot of growing up to do! He won't have much to do with this lil yarn, unfortunately, but maybe I'll write something about him and the rest of them after this is done!

Also if you catch the McElroy Brothers reference in this chapter, you get a cookie!

Things are kicking off! I only have a vague idea of where it goes! Anything I can do to improve is greatly welcome because I really do intend to do that as much as I can!

And yes, maybe the Einstein joke was intentional. And don't you worry, I will still try everything in my power to make sure we're sticking as much within canon as possible. It's such a nervewracking thing to share with people.

- G
Carol and Maria reunite as things escalate elsewhere. Fury, Monica and the Skrulls meet the last person they wanted to see during this time. Everything keeps on escalating. The stakes grow even more. The conflict never ends.

Maria groaned happily as the photon glow spread to her too.

Carol, in all the joyous moments of the reunion, had also partially forgotten just what the photon energy could do, and that when they had first reunited six years earlier, she'd caused a tea kettle to heat up on its own.

The same principle, adjusted a bit so she didn't burn Maria, was now being used to dry her up while she wrapped herself up in copious amounts of towels, still sopping wet and shivering.

In several seconds, she was completely dry, still wrapped up in the towels.

"Holy shit," said Maria, "you have a second life as a sauna."

Carol laughed at this. The reunion, while very pleasant, hadn't lasted long, because as much as Carol was surprised to discover she liked Maria pressing her mouth against her mouth repeatedly, it was also fucking freezing and the mechanics of that did not allow for hours and hours of mouth-pressing.

"Have we done that before?" Carol said shyly, pulling the towels off of Maria now that her clothes were completely dried as well.

Maria, without answering, wandered off out of the room, causing Carol to stomp after her, feeling out of place still wearing the Kree suit, feeling like a soldier entering an ice cream parlor. The house was small but it was a labyrinth, stacks of papers everywhere, much messier than it had been last time she was here.

"It's somewhere, I literally put all this together for right now and now I can't fucking find it," she heard Maria yell from the room she'd just darted in, and she turned to enter a room with nothing but stacks of papers and a large wooden desk, on top of which were several folders stacked, with more papers inside.

"What's that?" Carol asked.

"Your life," Maria said. "We're going over it. I'm not having you not knowing yourself any longer."

She motioned for Carol to join her behind the desk, opening the first folder.

"To answer your other question," she said, "We have done that before, but never outside. While sober."
"What does sobriety have to do with it?"

"It'll take a lot of explaining," Maria said, beckoning to her again. "Just get over here and read."

"What do you mean it's illegal?" Carol yelled at her fifteen minutes or so later.

They had begun reading. To their surprise and disappointment, just reading her handwriting and Maria's handwriting as a kid, the story about Maria's grandfather meeting Captain America, it did not mean there was a perfect ratio of remembering.

It was inconsistent. That was the first problem. Some stuff did come back. It seemed to correlate with how strongly it had made an impact on Carol before, but the memory of her parents and siblings was only a vague one, she vaguely remembered them but not very well, she knew they had existed and were related to her but couldn't remember anything about them. She knew how they looked in the few pictures of the whole Danvers family that was in the folders.

But the other problem was that Maria was, at the same time, trying to explain to Carol exactly why they were not allowed to kiss outside.

And this was downright farcical.

"How is it illegal?"

"It's not illegal," Maria said, exasperated. "It's frowned upon."

"Frowned upon by who?"

"Assholes," said Maria, getting a little more annoyed.

"Is that what they call themselves?"

"Carol," Maria said, annoyance shifting to affection, "now you're just teasing."

"That doesn't make any sense. Not even the Kree forbid that. We were forbidden to procreate without prior approval from the Supreme Intelligence, but relationships between the same gender happened all the time!"

"And it wasn't looked down on?"

"No, why would they look down on it?"

"Were you with anyone while you were on--"

"Hala. And no."

"You sure?"

"Are you jealous of me, Maria Rambeau?"

"I will be if you were with anyone."

"I wasn't, honest. Nobody was interested in me, I was interested in no one. I wasn't popular there, Maria."
"Doubtful."

"Kree are assholes."

"They made a good first impression on me."

Silence, and then Maria said: "I'm just teasing about it. Your body, your choice. I mean, I would be jealous, but I also wouldn't want to shame you for it, and be a total hypocrite. I was with people after you left."

"So what?"

"And you don't mind?"

"No, why would I? Why do I get to decide?"

"Humans--"

"Humans? You mean Terrans?"

"Sure, Terrans. Terrans are...very strange about this part of life, I guess. We're kind of trained from birth to be very possessive of other people's bodies and demand ownership over it. I don't want to be like that."

"You're not," said Carol.

"We're supposed to be looking up the records together."

"We are," said Carol, "it just baffles me that people would be so particular. Let me guess, next thing you know, they're gonna say that people can only be the biological sex they were born as." She burst out laughing, but Maria only coughed and looked down at the floor.

"That's definitely frowned on here."

"Are you shitting me?" Carol yelled out. "You're shitting me, Maria? This place can't be that backwards? Like half of Starforce had decided to switch, and they were assholes, but not because of that!"

"Really," said Maria, blinking.

"Yeah," said Carol. "Korath and Minn-Erva both. In Korath's case, might've been biologically male, but identified as neither, but we didn't talk enough to determine that. But they sure as hell didn't end up where they started, you know?"

"What do you identify as?" Maria asked, looking more and more confused.

Carol shrugged. "I don't know. Never thought about it. I'm OK where I'm at for now." She blinked herself, noticing Maria looking a bit uncomfortable now, and said, "Wait, is there a problem?"

Maria smiled. "No there's not. I'm just not very familiar with any of that, that's all. So it kind of feels like you're speaking a different language right now, if that makes sense. And I very badly want to know the language myself so you can feel safe with me."

"I do feel safe with you," Carol said, smiling back.

"I wasn't raised to even have that as an option," Maria said, "and I hope Monica doesn't feel that
way. I love her no matter who she is. Unconditionally. But it's unfamiliar to me."

"I understand," said Carol, still smiling.

"It is barbaric," Maria said, "but that's sort of the way it's always been. The people in power want it that way. The people in power wouldn't want us to be in public, and it pisses me off."

"Who's in power," Carol said, "I'll kill them."

"I think that might create bigger problems," said Maria. "They'd shoot a nuclear missile at you."

"Oh, that might do some damage."

"I'm not having your skin burnt off just to prove a point."

"I was able to do pretty well against that Kree fleet."

"Oh, sure, you'd take it far better than I ever could. But I'm not about to test that."

They both sighed, and Maria motioned with the papers she was holding in Carol's direction, pleading with her eyes for her to continue reading away.

"Can't I just get my memories with you and Monica back?"

Maria smiled. "Sure, but we're gonna have to do a lot of digging so we might as well go over everything."

"You really ought to get some sleep."

"No, I've waited six years for this."

"Maria," said Carol impatiently, "I really don't want that Carol Danvers back."

"Which one?"

"The one whose parents sounded really shitty and waited for any excuse to get rid of her. I just want the Carol that was with you and Monica and no one else. Is that so wrong?"

Maria sighed and put down the papers. "I don't know, Carol. I'm not doing this to force you to do anything. I just worried that you might feel incomplete without all of this."

"I'll always feel incomplete," Carol said. "I'm sure I felt incomplete before. My parents took from me, all the asshole Terrans I remember from here took from me, Yon-Rogg took from me, the Supreme Intelligence took from me. Even if I remember everything, all of that is still taken, it doesn't come back, I don't think."

"Monica didn't."

"No, Monica didn't." Carol smiled. Monica was too good for this world.

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Monica woke up with a start at a very loud sound. The sound was one she'd never heard before in person, but it was a tearing, and when she opened her eyes, the entire wall leading out of her dorm had just vanished. Torn right out.
Fury was right in front of her in a flash, pistol drawn, Goose running up besides him to see the source of the commotion.

Floating outside, a figure none of them had ever seen before, but the suit did look familiar. Monica would never forget the look of those sickly green and silver suits, though it didn't look the same as the ones she had seen six years earlier.

Extra attachments. A strange red hologram on the face mask, a bulkier build than before, gears and circuits whirring and steering themselves to life. She couldn't clearly see who was inside.

Floating outside the window, a sickly green photon glow surrounding him, Yon-Rogg smiled. Clicked on the universal translator.

"I'll ask you once nicely. Where's Vers?"

Then let out a yelp as something impacted with his face at top speed, causing him to begin to tumble. Whatever the something was, it hadn't been able to pierce the mask, but it felt like getting hit with one of Ronan's ships.

Fury, inside, smoke wafting out of the pistol, proceeded to leap right after him, only to be buffeted back by a photon blast from Yon-Rogg. Come to think of it, he'd never actually gotten hit by one before. Carol had let one loose onto a jukebox right when they first met, but he'd never actually felt it before. Now he did, it felt like a punch to the face by the hottest fist he'd ever felt.

It didn't have the same impact, Yon-Rogg reasoned as Fury flew back into the couch, cushioning the blow. Carol could destroy objects with hers, but she'd spent six whole years practicing. Possibly in secret. Counting the six wherever she'd gone off to, she had a solid twelve years of practice over him. But she was not here, her annoying friend was (how could he forget him?) and they must've known where she went off to.

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Yon-Rogg's plan, which he began formulating right after Vers intentionally set off the Kree sensors floating around the periphery of the Terran solar system, was a somewhat simple one, but one that he felt would give him everything he wanted.

1. Vers, either dead or allied with him again.

2. Much more physical power than the limited amount the Supreme Intelligence had gifted to him. He had been too weak to resist at first, but he did know a couple things it hadn't bothered to search for in his head, so pre-occupied with taunting him.

2a. He knew that the source of the Lightspeed Engine had been something called a Tesseract. He knew Vers had gotten her abilities from it, and he knew that without the direct source, the amount he would get would be limited in comparison.

2b. He was a much better fighter than Vers had ever been, and it still rankled him that she never played fair in their final fight. Nothing had rankled him more than this. "I have nothing to prove to you" were the seven most hurtful words anyone ever said to him. All that he had fought for, as her rightful master, and she acts as if he's beneath her? That would be settled.

2c. With the same powers Vers had, he had to be better than her. He'd fought in numerous missions over the last few years, killing who the Supreme Intelligence wanted him to kill. Mainly Xandarians on border worlds. They were forcibly assimilated or killed. He doubted Vers had been practicing as much. Practicing required killing and even before C-53, she liked to kill very quickly
and this made her easy to exploit in a lot of cases.

2d. Imagine what the Tesseract plus the Supreme Intelligence's gifts could give to him.

3. By the time he made it to the Terran system, the Supreme Intelligence would be too far away to be able to directly contact him through lightyears of space without expending most of its energy, and it wouldn't do that. It would instead send a fleet or two, possibly led by Ronan, after him. Knowing Ronan, he'd immediately see this as a chance to destroy C-53, and the Supreme Intelligence favored him more than any other these days. With the chance to properly prepare, Vers was able to focus long enough to destroy Ronan's fleet.

3a. Caught by surprise, Vers would not fare as well.

3b. Even if she did end up beating him, Ronan would bring a much larger fleet this time, enough to destroy the entire Terran solar system if he felt like it, and the sheer numbers would overwhelm her.

3c. He wanted his fair fight, and he would get it on his terms, one way or another.

Yon-Rogg was wrong on one count, and this one mistake dearly cost him, but not before there would be dear costs to others and setting a chain of events in motion that Fury would later deeply regret.

Fury doesn't die here, of course. He dies rather peacefully a long time later.

The mistake was assuming the Supreme Intelligence would respond at all.

Even a badly thought out plan can be deeply destructive.

The first issue for Yon-Rogg, in formulating the plan, was forgetting how fucking resourceful this Terran friend of Vers was. A measly Terran with no Tesseract-granted abilities taking out most of his fleet with the help of a woman (wait a minute, the younger one looks kind of like that woman, it can't be) and a Flerken.

Who was right there. The tentacles came out immediately, wrapping around him, and he let off every bit of energy he could trying to get out of it, forgetting that Flerkens can absorb Tesseract as well and so photon energy was nothing to it. He was just giving it an extended and very tasty snack.

So Yon-Rogg, without the years of practice and precision that Carol had put in, stupidly assuming that because he was her commander, he'd naturally do better, didn't bother to aim the next time he let off a proton blast.

It didn't come off his hands, it came off his entire body, and this meant that the building fucking erupted.

If Fury, Monica and Goose hadn't landed on top of the returning Skrull ship, piloted by a furious Talos and Soren, they would've died instantly from the impact and from all the debris landing on top of them.

Yon-Rogg might be stupid, but he was durable, and the building landing on top of him didn't kill him, but it definitely hurt like hell.
"How many people were away for vacation?" Fury yelled out in Monica's direction once several seconds had passed and he was able to somewhat regain his faculties, Goose pulling himself up by his tentacles off the side of the ship.

"Not everyone," Monica said back, much more quiet and barely audible over the hum of the ship.

"I hate to be that guy, mate," Talos said from the intercom, "But that Kree bastard just killed quite a few Terrans." The attempt at a chipper attitude failed him, he and Soren looked just as stunned. There was already screaming. Fellow students inside the debris.

"Talos, can you do something about that?" Fury yelled.

"Not without taking out more of them, all we got aboard are lasers and such."

"Dammit," Fury spat out, reaching over for his belt, where he kept that one particular beeper.

"This is definitely an emergency," he said quietly and hit it. The distinctive red and blue and yellow popped up on the screen.

Carol awoke with a start thanks to Maria shaking her awake as aggressively as she could. It had been the first time in a very long time that she had properly slept through the night. After looking through records a little while longer, not a whole lot clicking back aside from knowing what she and Maria had written in their journals as young children, she had been invited into Maria's bed and after a couple more reciprocated mouth presses from Maria, had drifted off to sleep, both of them a little too nervous to do anything else.

She had gotten to show Maria how Kree brushed their teeth, or rather using a small device on their belts that exposed them to a certain light that killed all the bacteria while keeping all of the good micro-organisms.

She'd been offered a t-shirt and pajama pants she'd apparently once owned, which was a faded t-shirt with a few women on it and the word spelled out as "HEATHERS" underneath it. So it was in that and the pants that she felt out of Maria's bed in surprise.

"What is it?"

"Fury's ringing you."

Maria held up the beeper, taken from where her Kree suit had been folded on a nearby chair. It was definitely flashing all right, and it was notable that Fury himself had never used it before.

"Maybe Monica's too much of a handful?"

"Carol?"

"I can spend the whole day with you. I don't want to leave you again like this. Fury's capable, he's--"

"Carol."

Much more forceful now. Maria Rambeau stood in her pajamas with her hands on her hips, the beeper still clasped in one hand, giving her the angriest look she'd ever seen from her. That was
coming back, that she only did this when she was genuinely upset with her in the days before the crash.

"Carol Danvers. I am not so sensitive that I would trade world peace for seeing you longer."

"I am not the only thing defending world peace."

"No, but you need to do your part."

Carol sighed. She was right. She pulled herself up with the help of the photon energy and began to pull the suit on over the pajamas, noting that it was actually way more comfortable this way. Kree typically put it on nude. What did you know?

Maria grabbed Carol by the hand and pulled her towards the front door, Carol being too flattered to resist.

This is where they'd parted years earlier, months for Carol.

They stood for a few moments awkwardly, before Carol finally said, "I'll be back very soon. I don't know how to describe what I'm feeling right now, and I barely had any time last time to talk to you about it, and whether or not we were something and whether or not that could be that way again, because who knows where I'll have to go next--"

"Carol." Maria being forceful again. "I love you. No matter what we are to each other. Go."

She squeezed her hand one more time. "Go get 'em, Captain Marvel."

"Don't say that. Monica came up with that as a kid."

"I like it. I'll be here, waiting for you."

So Captain Marvel did. Captain Marvel, steeling herself, took a running start, feeling the energy coursing through her, having just enough time to turn back and yell at Maria, "I love you too!" before blasting off into the sky, the proton energy pushing her at top speed as she felt the familiar mask growing and spawning around her face.

"There's going to be police any second," Fury said, with him and Monica once again aboard Talos' ship, the five of them and Goose all staring down at the debris being slowly shifted aside, Yon-Rogg clearly getting ready for another go.

"Is that bad?" Talos asked, still squinting down, trying to get a read of how many people might be stuck underneath all the debris, injured in any way.

"You're damn well right it's bad! It's the last thing we need! We'll all be exposed, I'll lose my job, Monica has to find a new dorm no matter what, we need to contain this now! This is what my damn initiative is for!"

"Initiative, mate?"

"I'll tell you about it later! Get a read on him!"

Just as Fury yelled that, the remainder of the debris shifted out of the way and Yon-Rogg pulled himself up from the wreckage. The modified suit he now wore only increased his height by a few inches, but it looked sturdy as all hell.
"Where's Vers?" He said again, staring them all dead in the eyes, looking nothing more like a rabid animal inside an advanced suit.

"No idea," Fury said, but Yon-Rogg only cocked his head and held a hand up to his ear.

"He can't hear you, mate," Talos said sheepishly. "You wanna go down there?"

"If I must," Fury said, "You take Monica and go."

"I'm staying, Uncle Nick!" Monica yelled.

"Like hell you are, your mother would never forgive me," Fury said, before motioning for Talos to land the ship in front of Yon-Rogg, mentally groaning as he saw college students, teachers, administrators, all begin to watch. The ship was still cloaked, so he knew they couldn't see them, but they could definitely see the strange man in the strange green suit and glowing green energy.

"I should go out," Soren said.

"Why?"

"He's never met me, and because I'm a Skrull."

And Soren got up out of the co-pilot seat, Talos lunging to hold her down but her disobeying, and activating the landing ramp, causing the others to huddle up behind the seats so they couldn't be spotted. Fury cursed as Goose suddenly launched free of his grasp and ran out of the shit with Soren.

Soren walked down the exit ramp but it was Vers, clad in her modified red and blue and yellow Kree suit, who exited the ship.

"We don't want people knowing what she looks like," Fury tried to say, but Talos shushed him with a hand over his mouth. Monica, for her part, was crouched over the Daughter with her own body in the direction of the windshield in case Yon-Rogg decided to try and blast the ship, which he could clearly see. Somehow they'd all been able to get on board without anyone else spotting them.

Talos and Fury, both with anxious hands over their mouths, watched anxiously as Soren, disguised as Vers, began to walk slowly towards Yon-Rogg, who aimed a single hand at all, glowing with green energy.

"How do I know it's you?" Yon-Rogg said with some menace.

"She's got this in the bag," Talos said, regaining a little confidence, "she's a very keen observer of people."

"Question me," Soren said in Carol's voice, "ask me anything you want."

"Whose blood did you receive when you first became Kree?"

"Yours, you silly goose," Soren as Carol replied with a smile.

"How does the Supreme Intelligence appear to you?"

"As Mar-Vell, but I knew her as Wendy Lawson."

"When did we spar last?"
"Aside from that day in the desert? The day before we left for Torfa."

"What was the name of the Kree who that wretch Talos disguised himself as?"

"So-Larr," said Soren after a moment to pause.

"Gotcha," said Yon-Rogg with a smile.

"His name was So-Larr," said Soren, trying to maintain her composure.

"You got the answer right, but you did get that look in your eyes when I mentioned Talos."

"Talos is a dear friend of--"

Wham. With a single blast of green photon energy, Soren was sent flying across the field connecting the dorms, vanishing into a bush with a loud impact, and did not come out again.

Talos roared an angry guttural Skrull roar from the cockpit, but the exit ramp had shut and Fury held his mouth down anyway.

"Where's the rest of you? I spotted the Terran, the one with one eye. How did one such as you manage to face off with a nation as glorious and as proud as the Kree? Perhaps you'd be good to assimilate with that strength."

Spotting the reflective glow of the cloaked ship, he fired a blast in its direction, shattering the windshield, causing Monica to push herself over the Daughter even as Talos roared again and pulled up his own seat off the floor in one fell swoop, holding it over both of them so that the glass splinters wouldn't cut either of them. Fury ducked under the cockpit.

"I see you," Yon-Rogg said menacingly in Monica's direction. "You're the child of that woman. I haven't forgotten her either. Is that where Vers is right now? Betraying more of her sacred Kree laws for her own benefit?"

Monica Rambeau was every bit her mother's daughter, and both Rambeaus and Danvers are gifted with a mighty terror that she somehow inherited from both families. Before Fury or Talos could stop her, she'd climbed off the Daughter, jumped through the gaping hole of the windshield, and fell the ten or so feet to the ground. Wincing, she pulled herself up to her feet, nothing broken, and stood defiantly glaring in Yon-Rogg's direction.

"At least you're brave," Yon-Rogg said, "I'll give you that. It takes a lot of gumption to challenge something you have no hope of possibly being able to fight."

"You speak about my mother again and I'll rip your dick off," Monica spat out in response.

Yon-Rogg glared at this, looked up to hear Fury's surprised laugh from inside the cockpit, looked back down at Monica.

"You disrespect your superior," he said, really digging into it, enjoying the feeling of total control, how he could break this measly Terran the second he decided. He understood now why the Supreme Intelligence had enjoyed taunting him so much.

"Or else what?" He said mockingly in return. Monica was seeing red, but what she did not see were some people who were most likely her classmates and teaching seeing the small college freshman standing up to this strange green-armored man.
"Or else she's gonna tell everyone what a little bitch you are!"

Yon-Rogg looked up again, to see Fury standing up straight now, not even pointing a gun. Next to her, he saw Goose hissing next to Monica, baring his teeth at him.

"You brought the Flerken."

"Damn right I did! You don't stand a chance now, Buzz Lightyear."

"Who's that?"

"None of your damn business!"

"Fury, shut up, mate," Talos whispered from below the cockpit, trying to tug at his leather trenchcoat, but Fury was having none of it, as the Fury family too had inherited a mighty temper and stubbornness.

"We're about to send you to infinity and beyond!"

"Enough taunting, Terran."

"Only Terran you're gonna see is the Terran that cat's gonna do to your balls--" Fury yelped suddenly as Talos tripped him, pulling him underneath the cockpit again.

"Monica!" He yelled, "Get back to the ship, mate!"

"Oh, that one sounds familiar. It sounds like General Talos, the other one who ruined my life, who didn't have the common fucking courtesy to just fucking die!" Another blast to the ship, causing it to rock back and forth, more components falling from it and revealing more of its shape. "Was that your dear wife back then? If she's not already dead, she will be!"

Talos stood up right then, making it Fury's turn to try and drag him underneath the cockpit again. "Alright, Yon-Rogg, you win!" His form began shifting as soon as he climbed through the window, taking the appearance of former SHIELD director Keller, suit and glasses and all, standing next to Monica. "I was the source of your troubles. You take me, and you do what you wish with me. You leave the rest out of it, they've got nothing to do with it."

"Wrong," said Yon-Rogg, "That's the child of that woman who piloted the ship, the Terran on board killed my men, and that Flerken over there killed even more! A true Kree never forgives, a true Kree never forgets!"

"Ironic, isn't it mate, with how you all start as Kree by forcibly forgetting everything about yourself."

And then he blew back against the front of the ship with a loud impact of his own, landing on the ground and beginning to bleed from his head the green Skrull blood, causing Yon-Rogg to smile.

"There you are, Skrull."

Talos coughed up blood, barely conscious, croaking at Monica, "Run, mate."

"Like hell I will."

"You'll die in an instant."

"One less instant for him."
"Damn you Terrans," he said absentmindedly before passing out, facefirst on the dirt, beginning to ever-so-slowly shift back into his true Skrull form, leaving Monica not much time to react before two alien species were discovered by the public at large.

"Now, little girl," Yon-Rogg said, still smiling. "I come for a something called the Tesseract, something your mother probably knows something about, and that one-eyed Terran in there would know more about."

"It's in Bogota."

"What?"

"Bogota, Colombia. That's where I'm stationed. You go down there, you'll find it. We're not tough to find."

"Sounds mighty relaxing for a paranoid Terran such as yourself."

"It's a secure location, but it would be no match for you. I'll ask for it myself if you want."

"I have a hard time believing you, Terran."

"Why would I lie to you, why would I be that stupid--"

And right on cue, with a loud hacking noise, Goose coughed up the Tesseract right out of its tentacles.

Yon-Rogg smiled, Fury gasped. "Oops," Yon-Rogg said, and charged at Goose the same second Fury climbed out of the ship himself, unloading his entire clip into him. Each impact hurt more than the last, but he used more photon energy for each to protect himself from their impacts.

The crowd now was murmuring and the second this happened, they all started to squeal and some began to run. Distant sirens could already be overheard. Goose, for his part, didn't help matters by having tentacles come flying out in the direction of Yon-Rogg, only to take a photon blast right down his gullet and go flying back and hit the front of the ship himself.

Monica jumped for it, but Yon-Rogg got there first, swatting her away only with enough force to leave forces.

"Ah ah ah," Yon-Rogg chided, "very stupid."

But Monica came running back anyway, charging him with her full might, which wasn't very much.

Then Yon-Rogg made his second mistake of the day, which was the timing by which he would try to punch in Monica's skull with a gloved hand, the worst possible timing for that.

He made his third mistake at the same time by touching the Tesseract with his other hand.

Several things happened.

1. The Tesseract's blue power combined with his green photon energy and relayed to him the feeling of every molecule in his body burning alive as if being tortured by red hot needles at the exact same time.

2. The blow meant for Monica because of this was ever so slightly off so it rammed a huge hole in the ground next to her.
3. Three words rang out before Yon-Rogg collided with something and was thrown back into the destroyed building.

Those three words were, screamed at the top of her lungs:


Chapter End Notes

Yeah we're into it now. Particularly bad headache today, so while it was easier to write out the thing, writing out thoughts about the thing, not so much.

Hope everyone's enjoying so far!

- G
Captain Marvel vs. Yon-Rogg

Chapter Summary

Carol and a greatly improved Yon-Rogg square off after six years apart, in what may very well be their final confrontation. How to do this without being discovered and filmed? How to do this while keeping Monica and the others safe? How to do this and be able to maintain some semblance of a personal life after?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Carol had put every ounce of photon energy she had in hitting Yon-Rogg the second she saw him. The Supreme Intelligence had modified the existing suit, not made a new one, so he was unmistakable the second she had flown close enough. In all the carnage she hadn't really been spotted, but she couldn't help but both enjoy the yelp Yon-Rogg let out as his nose broke and the immense pain coursing through her arm as bone collided with bone, covered with skin and muscle but still quite painful.

She flew right into him without giving him a second to react, but he was still able to put up the green photon energy in front of him, deflecting her blows as much as possible. She'd never been this angry, she just wanted to kill.

Then she gasped as Yon-Rogg drove a free foot into her stomach, launching her directly into the air, which gave her a good view of the crowd of Terrans all staring dumbfounded at her.

She had enough time to think "goddammit," before Yon-Rogg sprang up into the air and hit her again, harder this time, sending her several dozen feet higher into the air. She'd trained so long to deal with multiple weaker opponents that she wasn't exactly prepared to face one-on-one with someone of equal power.

On the flipside, neither had Yon-Rogg. They had no other way to prepare for each other than each other.

Carol let the weight and momentum take her back into a fall, feeling groggy from the hardest hit she'd ever experienced in her life, nothing on her mind except "MONICA MONICA MONICA MONICA"

Smart move. Though it meant she had to swoop in the way as Yon-Rogg angrily aimed another blow at Monica, causing her to take it in the back and colliding with the front of the Skrull ship, head cracking against the metal hull.

She rose from the ground, spitting blood, feeling more and more nervous about the situation, dreading that she might be too slow next time and having to reunite with Maria with the news she'd never want to deliver.

"What do you want?"

"The Tesseract."
"No dice. We're not playing this game again."

It still lay on the ground at Goose's feet, shining blue, Goose staring and poking at it but refusing to eat it again.

Yon-Rogg stepped towards it anyway.

"We're not doing this again, Yon-Rogg!"

"I'm not Yon-Rogg anymore," Yon-Rogg said, stepping so close she could feel the heat radiating off his skin. "I've got a new name now, a better name, one with which I will destroy you and everything you stand for. Call me Magnitron."

A second, and despite the pain, she could not help but let out a snort at this. "You've got to be shitting me."

She had known the second she said it that Yon-Rogg would hit her again, and he did, backhanding her back into the same building she'd just been thrown in. Still snickering in the wreckage and groaning with pain, for the first time she heard the screams and cries for help.

"Shit."

Yon-Rogg reached for the Tesseract again, grabbing it harder and seeming to be in even more pain this time, being blasted away, hitting his head on the ground hard, and passing out.

Carol immediately rushed towards the sounds of the screaming, seeing a group of students all huddling under a beam keeping a pile of debris from falling on them.

"Need a hand?" was all she could think to say to sound comforting before she pulled up on it with all her strength, pushing up and away so everyone could run out before she dropped it back in place.

They tried to thank her, but she waved the eager young Terrans off and yelled "Go! That's how you thank me."

She began to float around the wreckage, scanning as best she could, whispering "shit shit shit shit" under her breath.

Then she suddenly saw the limp hand sticking out from another pile and fell to the ground. She turned away but it was a second too long, that person was far from being helped and she'd arrived too late. For a split second, everything came back, she felt herself collapsing inside herself and probably would've fallen over in a panic if she hadn't heard more screams and steeled herself again.

"You're too late for that one, but not for them," she said to herself, and flew in their direction, pulling the debris off of them, helping one to an ambulance that had just arrived, knowing she was exposing herself to them but not having any real choice. Flying back into the air, she spotted from several hundred feet away a fleet of vans that belonged to something Fury had called "the news," and if they saw her, they'd be able to film projections of her, and then it was game over. Loosely told stories was one thing, but actual projected evidence of her existence was the last thing she needed.

So she went, exerting a lot of effort on her end but making it look very easy to the onlookers, all of whom marveled at the woman in the colorful suit who could fly, helping out people she'd never seen or met before just because.
She heard Yon-Rogg stirring, Fury aiming the gun at him and falling back, Talos pulling Soren from the bush sobbing in tears, the Daughter trying to help him as best he could.

Monica was still over a ways away trying to help a couple more survivors out of the way, when Yon-Rogg, without looking, swung in the direction of the Tesseract, connect one of the tubes on his arm to it, and suddenly the glow was different, and it didn't seem to hurt him anymore, rather make him look stronger. The other effect was to knock it in Monica's direction.

"Shit!" Carol yelled out, and flew as fast as she could towards Monica.

The upside: Carol was fast enough to reach Monica first.

The downside: Monica was fast enough to also try to shield Carol with her own body.

The result: This meant that Monica leaped towards Yon-Rogg, Carol leaped towards Monica, and Yon-Rogg leaped for the Tesseract, and nobody got what they wanted, except Monica only for a second.

She fell through the air, grabbing the tube on Yon-Rogg's arm, having it entirely pull out, the suit, already badly damaged by Carol, ripping off quite a bit as she landed in the grass.

At the same time, Carol wrapped her arms around Monica to protect her from Yon-Rogg.

At the same time, Yon-Rogg screamed as the suit overloaded, sending courses of uncontrollable photon energy through his body.

This, in essence, created a sort of improvised wire that had a beginning and the end, all because Yon-Rogg’s damaged suit touched the Tesseract, Carol grabbed Monica, Monica held onto the damage tube arm of the suit as the tip of it touched the Tesseract.

Circuit.

All three of them screamed, energy passing through Yon-Rogg, being filtered through Carol, who could withstand it, but then into Monica, the receiver of that energy. Somehow Carol realized she was about to pass out before using that last moment awake to kick Yon-Rogg as hard as she possibly could.

Aiming blindly, she hit the now defenseless Yon-Rogg, with the full power of the Tesseract, right in the groin.

Her last thought was how similar it all looked to when she had destroyed the Lightspeed Engine to protect Mar-Vell.

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Fury had acted insanely fast after that. The good news was that Soren was a Skrull and not a Terran so that kind of hit merely gave her a bad concussion, and she would more or less be fine after a few days of recovery.

The bad news was that both Carol and Monica were unconscious, and Carol would not let go of the Tesseract.

Talos hypothesized, once the damaged ship had taken flight, a bound Yon-Rogg in the back (beaten far worse than before, missing teeth now, Fury had hit him quite a few times before Talos could stop him), that Carol was the only reason Monica wasn't dead.
She had acted as a conduit for the Tesseract in that moment of desperation, filtering its energy through herself so that Monica wouldn't be killed by it, though that level of exposure was still disturbing. He doubted Carol herself would change much, as she'd been able to hold it barehanded before with no trouble. As far as Monica went, they weren't sure. At least she hadn't actually touched it with her bare skin, she was unconscious but still clearly breathing, vitals looked like she was running a marathon but no other changes.

Carol and Yon-Rogg had both been spotted, but luckily neither of them had been filmed by any of the news trucks. They'd been spotted by college students and teachers who would be attributed to cases of mass hysteria later on thanks to a SHIELD report Fury would end up writing, regretting pegging them as unstable but not knowing what else to do.

Not knowing where else to go, the ship too damaged to leave the atmosphere for a while, they flew back to Maria's, hoping and praying that she would take this development well.

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Maria took it as well as she possibly could. Carol had woken up first, naturally, though she felt like she was in a considerable amount of aches and pains, though it seemed that the Tesseract had had some kind of healing effect on her. When she had arrived, she'd actually broken both her jaw and the arm she punched Yon-Rogg with. She'd had internal bleeding like crazy, the amount of damage the newly powered Kree had inflicted on her would've killed her if not for touching the Tesseract herself.

She'd had so much adrenaline flowing through her system that she hadn't realized it till after she woke up and discovered that her injuries had been replaced with a series of more consistent but less painful aches and pains.

She'd woken up to Maria practically jumping on top of her, sobbing and stroking the hair out of her face. She'd been far too groggy to say anything other than "I love you and I never want to leave you again," which had caused Soren to punch Talos in the arm and beckon at him to deliver her a bit of Xandarian currency. Fury had said, "you made bets?"

To which Soren had said, "I bet which would say it first."

To which Carol had croaked out, "she said it first this morning."

To which Talos said, "pay up, Honey Bunches of Oats," and Carol laughed so hard despite the aches in her chest that she then grimaced and everyone had to stop so she wouldn't hurt herself further.

Monica was still asleep, glowing blue in contrast to the yellow-orange glow that usually surrounding Carol. Talos did nothing but make her comfortable (she created the feeling of static electricity when touched but no other effects), but they all checked on her, and she just didn't wake up, though her vitals never changed.

The destruction of Monica's dorm was attributed to a dumbass student trying to set the gas heater in the building on fire as a prank and killing himself in the explosion. A lot of eyewitnesses talked about seeing a woman in a strange uniform at the scene trying to defuse everything, reporters speculating where she went, but no signs of what she looked like or a name. Speculation as to whether or not this was the same woman in 1995 who fought a shape-shifting alien on a Los Angeles subway.

Talos laughed ruefully at that. Fury gulped, as he had killed one of Talos' men that day.
"All's fair in love and war, mate."

Talos went right to fixing the ship with a matter converter, which they used to convert grass and pebbles and such into glass and metal and anything they needed. Soren slept on the cot inside the ship, healing gels placed on her injuries and left mostly alone.

The Daughter went off with Fury to the nearby field, where he radioed into Bogota and told Coulson to let everyone know he'd be handling the situation in New Orleans personally, and that nobody was to question it. The Daughter, for her part, made Fury a necklace out of flowers, which he reluctantly put on over his black t-shirt. It was so hot in the Louisiana bayou that he'd stopped bothering with his now trademark leather getup as soon as they had gone back to Maria's. She told him a little bit about Tarnax and how everyone was getting on over there and asking him to visit, though how Fury learned all this without her physically talking, he wasn't sure. He was very nervous that the little Skrull girl was telepathic and wasn't sure how to feel about that.

Yon-Rogg was in a medically induced coma. Both for his own good and because they did not want him away. He'd been stripped naked and dressed in some of Frank's old clothes he'd never taken by Talos. The Kree suit was hidden in a compartment, with Talos fully intending to study it later to figure out how it had worked. He knew for sure that whatever the Supreme Intelligence had tried to do to him didn't work as well as it may have hoped.

Monica stayed asleep the rest of the night, though in the morning Fury found her hovering over the bed, curled up in the fetal position, still glowing blue all around her, her vitals finally returning to normal.

That left Carol and Maria. In the interest of privacy and respect towards them both, we won't discuss further what they ended up doing to pass the time, but I will say that Carol was awkwardly but eagerly reintroduced to some old Terran customs.

Before we leave our cast of characters for the night, I will report on one more little event that happened that night.

I'll say it like this: Fury had originally planned to sleep inside Maria's house, bidding Talos and the Daughter goodnight and walking towards the house, and then the following happened, from the perspective of Talos:

1. Fury stopped dead in his tracks in front of the front door, standing still for a few seconds. He was just close enough that Talos could clearly see him still.

2. His hand went to his mouth, while Talos leaned closer to the cockpit window, staring at him in confusion.

3. Clearly stifling surprised laughter, he shook his head a couple times and ran faster than Talos had ever seen him run back to the ship, climbing aboard like he'd de-aged several decades.

4. Stifling a laugh, Fury said: "Please let me sleep in here tonight."

5. Talos, still a little confused, asked why.

6. Fury said: "Look, man, I'm just trying to respect their privacy."

7. Talos' eyes widened and he said "Oh!" very loudly.

8. Fury went off to find the extra cot.
9. The Daughter asked what was going on.

10. Talos said "you'll learn when you're older."

11. The Daughter accurately guessed.

12. Talos sighed and said "go to bed, love."

On top of the Tesseract, glowing on the counter next to the bridge, Goose slept, meowing peacefully.

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! Tomorrow will be the last update till around Sunday or Monday, personal stuff I need to get taken care of and I won't have time till then :/

This is an odd one that got dramatic and more comedic and then back again so hopefully it's a tonal shift that works, and it's been a good way to flex the different creative muscles and see what happens.

Comments, suggestions to improve, anything really works! Debating whether I should try for another fic after this is done or something original, we will see I guess.

Hope you like it!

- G
Observant and Cruel

Chapter Summary

Carol and Fury have a heart-to-heart. Then Fury has a heart-to-heart of sorts with Yon-Rogg. Things don't go exactly as planned, but when do they ever? Can this found family get a moment of rest in the chaotic time that was 2001?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The events of the previous evening was largely why only Talos and the Daughter greeted Carol in the morning.

Both of them had enough sense to play stupid, so Carol spent a good part of the morning thinking that she'd more or less gotten away with what Maria told her people just don't openly talk about in most settings, which still confused her a lot. But she could understand why the Supreme Intelligence would make it forbidden: you'd rebel against an empire if you were lucky enough to figure that out.

That good part of the morning continued when Monica finally woke up, and with her almost tremendous inability to lie, meant that if she had known of anything, it would be very out of character since she just seemed confused as to how she had gotten back to her house.

The issue began when Fury did not appear at all, and when Talos accidentally let slip that he was still on the Skrull ship, supposedly keeping watch over the medically unconscious Yon-Rogg.

That's when the good part of the morning ended. For a few reasons. The first was that the immensely oblivious Carol went off to find Fury on her own, leaving Talos and the Daughter alone. Maria had been getting ready for the day and freshening up, and so the only communication between the two of them before they started making breakfast together was a silent mouthed "thank you" from Maria for Talos not saying anything dumb.

"Don't mention it, love. I don't know what you're talking about."

Fury had uncharacteristically avoided Carol's gaze when she arrived on the ship. He hadn't entirely been lying, because Yon-Rogg was sturdier than they thought and the fluids coursing through his veins, the Skrull equivalent of keeping someone passive and docile, was only working so well. He was conscious, but barely able to move, and Fury hadn't realized this but saw him seeming to stir in his sleep. This elixir of sorts, provided helpfully by Soren, was usually used for medical patients and victims of war, but now it had been repurposed to restrain one of their greatest foes within the confines of his own unconscious mind for a while.

Regardless, he more than likely did not need a Terran spending hours upon hours observing him, and Fury did so anyway.

It was an excuse to not address how stupid he felt, a middle-aged man feeling like a dumb kid who had wandered into his parent's room at the worst possible time. The young Fury had actually done that, so double whammy. Had even addressed it during his early SHIELD days in therapy, how so
much of his life had been running away from his own parents as long as he could, though he was on somewhat good terms with his mother these days. She still assumed he did some vague military work.

But Carol was oblivious, and finally demanded to know what the hell she had done to offend him so much, and the middle-aged man not wishing to look like a child blurted out: "look, I went back to the house at the wrong time, and I'm really sorry."

Carol had blushed and said, "oh."

And then "um."

And then "well."

And then silence for a few seconds, because she had no frame of reference to what was going on beyond the fact that Fury had accidentally learned that she was engaging in some Terran customs again.

"What happened?"

"I was going to sleep inside the house. I had gone off to notify Bogota, so I didn't check with anyone else, and then by the time I had got back, it turns out you were already busy and I did not want to be rude and interrupt things, so I went to the ship."

"You didn't interrupt anything."

Fury finally laughed at this. "Good. I know Terrans have hangups."

"You really do. Maria kept telling me it was our secret and we couldn't say and why not? I always thought Talos and Soren were so dumb thinking we couldn't hear them, but holy shit, it's a lot tougher to stay silent than you--"

"OK, alright, I get it."

"What? You come back with us and see how slick they think they are."

"I'd rather not."

"You Terrans are so strange about this!"

"I know, it's ingrained in us from birth. It's just rude to not let people be private about it here."

Awkward silence for a few moments, until Carol slumped down into the nearest seat, letting out a contented sigh and saying "Wow."

Fury sat down too, giving a look at Yon-Rogg quickly and saying, "Well uh, seems like you didn't waste your time."

"Absolutely not."

More silence, until Carol looked up and said, "Can we talk about it?"

"Um," said Fury.

"No, not like that," said Carol, "I don't think we're each other's type."
"Carol," said Fury, "you're an absolutely astounding person. You might be one of the few people on this planet I genuinely love. I would die to protect you. But I don't think anybody is my type."

Carol said, "Oh."

And then "Does that suck?"

And Fury said: "Not for me it doesn't. I've never felt it before. It's foreign to me. It's why I react so strangely to it, I guess. I haven't ever told anyone that. It's why I don't marry or have kids myself. Everyone at the office assumes I have a secret boyfriend somewhere, because any man not up to his elbows in tail--"

"Tail?"

"Women."

"That's really dehumanizing."

"It is. I'll stop using that expression."

"Like men doing that thing with a lot of women."

"Yes."

"Got it."

"Anyway, it's never been for me. I don't let many people in. I never have, with anyone. At least not by choice."

Carol said, "oh."

Fury said: "and that's why I don't have the desire at all. It was like that before that."

And then: "I'm sorry for bringing that up now. I didn't mean to ruin your moment."

Carol winked, or the Terran-turned-Kree-turned-Terran equivalent, one eyelid squishing down as hard as it could, and said: "My moment was yesterday."

Fury laughed a little laugh and said: "OK."

Silence again, the two sitting across from each other for several long seconds.

Fury suddenly got a little intense and said: "And, not to be paranoid, but you wanted to."

Carol said: "Wanted to what?"

Fury raised his eyebrows.

Carol said happily: "Oh yes."

Fury smiled. "Good. If there's any advice I can give, only do that if you absolutely want to, if however many folks involved do."

Carol said: "Fury, I'm not a Kree youngling. I know all this."

Fury said: "Just making sure."
Carol said, still smiling: "She never stopped asking me if I wanted to do something, and that we could stop at any point, and that she just wanted to be near me, and holy shit, I have never ever felt so connected to someone in my life, Fury. I did not know that was going to happen at all, not at all."

Fury's eyes widened and said, "Oh, so--"

"Well something was supposed to happen," Carol said breathlessly, "and it happened a lot, and my god, I can't believe that that used to happen so often before the crash. And then I wanted to make it happen for her too and she swore that I did so much and--"

Suddenly they both practically fell out of their chairs as Yon-Rogg let out a strangled muffled yell from his place on the cot, causing Fury to draw his gun and aim it square at his forehead.

Yon-Rogg's eyes were open. The more his eyes opened, the more Fury's expression, which Carol couldn't see, switched slowly from shock, to confusion, and then, a slowly growing smile that only Yon-Rogg could see.

"He's still asleep, he's just reacting to the medication," Fury said, looking him square in his begging, pleading, helpless eyes.

"OK," Carol said, shifting back onto the chair. "I really need to watch where I'm talking."

"You lucked out this time." Fury said, gun still aimed squarely at him. "You know what? Let's go inside, let's help Maria make breakfast for everyone, we've brought Soren inside so she can get some proper rest on a proper bed. I'll lock up and be in shortly."

"OK," Carol said cheerfully. She looked happier than Fury had ever seen her, a pep to her step that hadn't really been there since the last time they had first met at that damn Los Angeles Blockbuster, when she was cracking wise far more.

Silence long enough to have both of them notice this, and Fury said, with a raised eyebrow, "Thank you, Maria."

And Carol let out an uncharacteristically high-pitched giggle, and walked over to Fury and hugged him.

"I'm very grateful for you, Agent Fury."

"You too, Carol," Fury said right back, "Go on and say good morning to everyone else."

"And don't be weird!" Fury yelled after her as she practically scampered off the ship. He watched her go, smiling pleasantly. After all of the hardships and horrors she'd been through, it was good to see something working out for her.

The smile slowly turned sinister as he turned to Yon-Rogg, eyes still open, face still puffy and bruised.

"You see, Yon-Rogg," Fury said slowly, sitting back down and facing him, hands clasped, "I'm not quite as dumb as I look."

Yon-Rogg could only whimper in response, not physically able to talk.

"Now, considering what you and your assimilated buddies did to my kind, it was already going to be your ass. Us Terrans, as you call us? We hold grudges like nobody else. We don't take kindly to folks trying to annihilate us like your buddy with the fleet did."
He raised the gun again, pressing ever so softly into the bruised flesh on his face, causing Yon-Rogg to whimper even more. "Which Fury is the real one? Is it the one affectionately praising one of the kindest, most compassionate and empathetic people he's ever encountered in his long miserable life? Or is it the man inflicting pain on you because you once inflicted pain on her?"

He moved the gun away. "Can't it be both, Yon-Rogg? Can't I both love that woman dearly like a sister and also take so much joy in inflicting pain on the man who made her life hell for six long years? Now, to be entirely fair, we both know she needs no protection from either of us. She could whoop our behinds faster than we could say 'uncle.' Y'all morons created the strongest woman in the galaxy by mistake, then brainwashed her for six years? I don't like that."

"She was part of a greater mission than yourself," Yon-Rogg was able to spit out, muffled.

"Greater mission? I've heard of that. The whole purity thing. Make everyone superior, keep only the supposedly strongest parts of a species to use, only certain folks deserving of life? Y'all ain't special. We have all sorts of types advocating for the same things here on good old Planet C-53, as you refer to us. We got a billion names for em. Every war's got people with different names. Nazis are the most famous, but that's worldwide, and if you look over here in the good old U.S. of A, well they called themselves the Confederacy. All wearing different outfits, all wanting the same shit."

"They wanted purity?"

"In a manner of speaking. Only they wanted to decide who was pure and who wasn't, and they were always conveniently the pure ones, never the impure ones. Funny how that works, right? Isn't it so strange how those who are always so obsessed with purity always see themselves as the only pure ones?"

"The Supreme Intelligence is beyond such petty concerns."

"Maybe so. I ain't never met your Supreme Intelligence. But so far, it doesn't sound any different to me. And it made the biggest goddamn mistake it ever made turning her into one of you."

"She wouldn't be able to do what she does without us."

"So trauma makes you stronger? They love to say that, too. Y'all need some new slogans, Mr. Yon-Rogg."

He got up and moved to the window, looking back at the happy procession through the window. The last few years had been him slowly developing the two Nick Furys, the one most saw, and the one that folks like Carol and Maria and Monica and Talos and Soren and the Daughter got the honor of being able to see. He switched from Tough Fury to Soft Fury for a moment, not being able to help it, watching them all through the window, Soren finally awake, Monica awake too, making pancakes and eggs and waffles, all of them giggling and chattering, the found family he never knew he needed.

Yon-Rogg saw this shift in the reflection of the window, and cowered back as soon as Tough Fury reappeared, the one that put the fear of God into both friends and enemies, Work Fury, the one who seemed invincible. Impassive, stoic, dry quips and snark, nothing ever shaking him. That Fury.

"Now, to be fair," he said, "You did get to see a side of me reserved for very few, and out of the generosity of my heart, I'll allow you to have that, because you don't really have anyone to snitch to." He turned back from the window, leaning up against the counter, where Goose had stirred. The flerken hissed in Yon-Rogg's direction and did not move from her place on top of the Tesseract, daring him to make a move for it.
"I just want the Tesseract. I will have it, and then I will be all-powerful, and I will destroy the Supreme Intelligence and be the leader the Kree deserve, who will kill anyone who has slighted us." Yon-Rogg's voice grew less muffled, the Skrull elixir beginning to wear off. Fury did not move, or make any sign that he was threatened.

"Yeah, OK," Fury said, sounding extremely bored, sitting back down next to his cot. "This is all so fucking boring, you realize that right?"

Yon-Rogg blinked. He had expected defiance, but apathy?

"You're all the same. And yes, I know you're not from around here, but round here, you're what we call a narcissist. And the thing to know about narcissists is they have this real entitled nature to them. They seem to think the whole world is owed to them on a silver goddamn platter. Narcissists are in charge on this planet, so the whole world runs by their pointless and archaic rules, and I am forced to work around them. But the advantage of my station is that y'all have to learn what it's like when the playing field is suddenly leveled, for a split second."

Yon-Rogg just kept blinking. This was all Terran talk. He'd been warned that they had a strange manner of speaking. Even Vers had the strange Terran inclinations when she'd been a proper Kree and not this Carol Danvers nonsense.

"You're smart for your type, Yon-Rogg. I'll give you that. But you sure as hell throw fits like they do, though in your case you want an artifact that'll let you commit mass genocide against whoever the hell you want--"

"The Supreme Intelligence is a threat to us all, to all Kree. Why should we be ruled by an artificial intelligence when we can be ruled by a pureblood Kree, a real leader--"

"Like you'd do any better. Kree isn't even a thing, it's just the assimilated, the blue blood and everything. There's no such thing as a pureblood Kree, that's a distinction you made up because you wanna kill lots of things and you're too coward to admit it."

He smiled. "That being said, we can have that argument all day and you'll never be swayed. Your type will stick to their guns and only do anything nice when they think they'll get a gold sticker after"

Yon-Rogg cocked his head. "What's a gold sticker?"

Fury coughed. "We're not gonna talk about that anymore. We are gonna talk about how I've got you good."

"You didn't. I'll be out of this funk soon, as soon as this Skrull liquid is through my system, and then I will--"

"I mean, I kinda did not give you as much as Talos told me to. I let you wake up a little. A secret about me is that I am both very observant and very petty. So the plan formulated to get you worse than hitting you once I walked back to the house last night and discovered Carol was getting re-acclimated to the Terran way of life."

"She's called Vers."

"Carol," Fury said, ignoring him, "really suffered at your hands a lot. Made her into an unthinking, unfeeling soldier for a while. But I am observant, and I am petty, so I did notice during that whole little fight how heated you were getting, and I am very observant, so I figured out why you're so obsessed with her, and that's such a gross thing. Kree can't do that!"
"None of," Yon-Rogg spat out, face getting hot and red, "your concern."

"It IS my concern!" Fury snapped back. "I observed several things: one, my Terran friend got what you always wanted. Two, I am an observant and petty person, and known to be quite cruel. Three, if Carol was gonna tell anyone it was gonna be me. Four, I was going to make you listen to how goddamn happy she is, because you're never gonna be the one to provide that."

Yon-Rogg stewed even more, shuddering, recoiling in horror as Fury's smile grew and grew.

"Carol would probably be offended if you told her, and you're more than welcome to try. I won't stop you. It was a cruel and hurtful thing to do to her, and I don't deserve to be forgiven for it. Did I do it to see the look on your stupid, dumb, beaten face who just killed a whole bunch of my Terran kind because you couldn't just be told no?"

"I will kill you!" Yon-Rogg spat out, blushing purple, spittle flying everywhere, Fury beginning to laugh.

"You'd be such a great man if you could be told no more often, Yon-Rogg," Fury said, "But I don't have the time or patience to teach empathy for you, and when you go after what I care about, I will return the pain tenfold. So I have. It'll be on your obsessive, gross, nasty, lecherous little mind for the rest of your goddamn miserable life. I don't have time for empathy for maggots like you. All I ever hear from people is to keep giving people like you a chance, the people who would put me and her and everyone in that house in their graves the second they got a chance. All their talk of 'both-sides' this and 'lesser of two evils' that. Fuck that."

Yon-Rogg, still groggy from the medication, choked out, "I would've made her so happy!"

Silence now. Fury still smiling. "See, that's the tell right there. If that was true, you wouldn't have to say shit like that. You wouldn't feel entitled to anything. You'd just want to love and support her however she needed, and then she'd support you however you needed, but you never learned those boundaries and never learned the word 'no.' You're beyond saving."

Yon-Rogg was furious before, but in a rush of adrenaline, he felt all of his strength returning, and even without the Kree suit, even with the power of the Supreme Intelligence drained from him, he was still a considerable combatant.

He bum-rushed Fury, catching him by surprise. With his Kree strength, he ripped a panel from the wall and bashed Fury across the face with it, knocking him to the floor, bleeding out his head. The momentum whipped the panel around, clanging with a loud noise against the opposite side of the thin interior. Fury coughed and hacked and wheezed, the room draining away at once, the Skrull metal being of a much sturdier sort that what was found on C-53.

Fury, in retrospect, should've obeyed Talos when it came time for the dosage.

Through the window, he saw the entire procession rushing at the tail end of the ship, and he hit the button to open it so they could see the unconscious Fury on the ground next to him. They all stopped dead in their tracks upon seeing Yon-Rogg looming over Fury, sharpened slice of panel raised. All the color left Carol's face at once, alarm bells going off in her head, mind finding ways to blame herself. After all of this, she couldn't lose anyone else, she couldn't lose him.

"Shouldn't have left me alone with him, Vers," he cackled as he raised the panel like a bludgeon over his head, swooping down with one motion to impale him and take him out for good, take the secret out for good.
The blow never landed. He felt his arm wrenched out of place and he yelled out, wondering in his pain how Carol had suddenly become this strangely bloodthirsty. Yon-Rogg had never felt pain of this magnitude before. Not even the Tesseract had hurt this much. It intensified and got worse and worse and worse and worse, and he let out a bloodcurdling scream as he dropped the panel helplessly with his busted arm. Through the pain, tears came to his eyes, half at just how much the blow had hurt and how betrayed he felt that Carol had chosen everyone else over him.

He looked up to see Carol recoiling in surprise as the small child of the woman (that accursed woman!) raising her hand, coating him with a blue energy that had contrasted the green he had once possessed. It was with this blue energy that the child reduced him to nothing but constant pain, nothing but the sum of his entire being and consciousness torn from himself all at once. He forgot who he was, or who everyone else was, and all that was there aside from this now was the child, and every awful thing he'd ever done, ever disgusting thing he'd justified, all of it, displayed before him in an eternal second. A psionic connection of sorts, his obsessions and his vices and now everything in his mind screamed at him that he deserved what he was about to get.

Everyone outside the ship at once moved towards the child to try and stop her, but it was far too late.

"I warned you," the small child screamed at him in echoing fury before all of him was nothing at all.

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter this time! This is not the end of the narrative, but the last time I'm posting till Sunday or Monday depending on when my flight gets back. Something of a cliffhanger to keep y'all going until then!

I have a vague outline I draw from when writing and this is a moment that felt very necessary but made me feel very nervous, so hopefully it comes across the right way to everyone. I am almost certain that this choice doesn't violate canon, but we've got till like what, 2022 or something, till we'll know if I'm wrong? I just have to keep on guessing when Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck (writers/directors, possibly coming back for the sequel) are gonna reveal details and that won't be for a while. But I feel as though this makes sense. If not, I have kind of a workaround!

Anyway, if this has been interesting to you so far, and you don't mind waiting till Sunday or Monday (so the 16th or 17th of June at time of writing), that's when you'll be seeing Chapter 10!

I'm always kind of nervous to admit that I've connected to this particular film and its characters in a way I wasn't expecting to upon seeing it for the first time (I have since seen it once more, with my grandmother, who really enjoyed it, actually!), and that's why I'm doing this.

Anyway, Monday is far more likely since the flight is supposed to be in very late, see y'all then! Comments, suggestions to improve, horoscopes, whatever, all more than welcome!

- G
A Brief Respite

Chapter Summary

Everyone's got to relax somehow after the traumatic events of that morning. Not included in this chapter: Fury mentioning something about a "beach episode" and nobody having any damn idea what he's talking about. But they do get to have a little more fun in the eye of the storm.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"You shouldn't have done that."

"I know."

Carol held the Tesseract in one hand, the other placed on Fury's forehead where the gruesome gash had been placed. If it had worked on Monica and herself, maybe it could work with him without a direct connection like it had done to Monica.

The cut slowly began to retract and heal itself, using Carol as the filter, Fury groaning in pain.

"I did not need defending."

"I told him as such. I just wanted to hurt him. I wanted to hurt him as badly as I could hurt a person. I damn well did it."

Fury had, more or less, gotten what he wanted. Monica abruptly disintegrating her own accidental creator had not been what he was expecting, nor did he expect Yon-Rogg to recover so quickly. He'd made a lot of bad choices in a short time because he was angry and wanted revenge and had spent years seething at the idea of this disgusting slobbering freak of a man who had essentially held Carol captive for that long.

Yon-Rogg was dead. Carol wasn't very sad about this. She was more worried about Monica, who swore up and down that she hadn't meant to kill him, just wanted to prevent him from hurting Fury further. Monica never lied. But Monica still insisted they needed to call the police on her, put her in jail for life, for this awful thing she had done.

It was an awful thing. Kree were programmed to enjoy murder. She'd been programmed to find joy only comparable to what Maria had made her feel the previous night in killing and dismembering. Shooting to bits. Yon-Rogg only ever complimented her when she would show off her kills. Was that why Talos had been so forgiving, how much she didn't want to after she'd stopped being exposed to the Supreme Intelligence? How much of that was her?

Fury had never felt more stupid and small and tiny and useless in his long life. Carol had to forgive him, they both knew they couldn't help but forgive each other after all they'd been through. But it wasn't Carol who was owed the apology, it was Monica.

Carol, for her part, could not stop mentally hitting herself for being so dumb as to intentionally set off the Kree sensors. She'd only wanted to taunt them, she only wanted to say "here I am! You
missed me! I never needed you!"

Maria, to everyone's surprise, was extremely pleased with the result of Yon-Rogg being dead, though obviously not with Fury getting as badly hurt as he did in the process. As far as she knew, Fury had gone back to check on him and didn't realize Yon-Rogg had woken up, then tried to sacrifice himself to protect everyone else. She did not praise her child, obviously, for committing cold-blooded murder in the heat of the moment. She was loving and affectionate and held her as Monica cried herself hoarse in terror and panic.

But internally, the moment of Yon-Rogg's face, stricken with pain and anguish and regret, she was going to cherish that moment for the rest of her days as much as she cherished her time with Carol. Maria had never ever wanted a person to be in that much pain before, and it scared her a lot. She had never wanted to hurt Carol's abusive parents, or the army brats who gave them both shit, or her brothers, or her brother's friends, all these people had hurt them both so badly, in ways she didn't want to think about. Carol had been magically relieved of so much trauma that she couldn't remember that only her body remembered. Maria didn't have that advantage.

She worried something was wrong with her, enjoying Yon-Rogg's death as much as he did.

Talos and Soren didn't have an opinion on the proceedings. Yon-Rogg had been a major enemy to end all enemies of the Skrulls, and a celebration was planned on Tarnax, complete with burning effigies of his body. But they didn't tell anyone else this. The death of their enemies was a big deal to Skrulls, and Terrans were as strange and particular about death and violence as they were about fornication. They all seemed to be very linked in the mind of the Terrans.

The Daughter spent a while in the fields, talking to bugs and plants and animals of the C-53 system for a while, then got bored and decided to ask them about the meaning of life. The bees gave the best answer, they said "save honey for the ones you love, and cherish all the time you have with them."

She thanked them for their time and went back to the house, where she visited Maria and Monica and gave them both a hug. She visited her parents and reported what she had learned, and they all put their foreheads together for a partial mind meld.

She visited Carol and Fury and brought him another necklace of flowers, which Carol preserved perpetually using the Tesseract so Fury could wear it whenever he wanted, and made it extra tough to tear up for good measure.

Fury reported back to Bogota that he had just gotten into a nearly fatal encounter with a hostile extraterrestrial, but luckily the one good Kree known as Vers had eliminated him. Humanity would be forever safe, but to expect more retaliation from the Kree, that they couldn't shape-shift like the Skrulls did, he had determined that the Skrulls had declared Terrans as their perpetual allies for life.

Coulson was told about this, Clint Barton was not, and Coulson reported back that Barton was furious with him for it. After the Chitauri attack on New York, he angrily confronted Fury about it at long last and Fury shrugged and said "Wasn't them last time."

Alexander Pierce, the director of SHIELD, was not informed of this. Later on, a decade and change down the road, Fury would determine that this might've been a really good choice, a rare one on his part.

The media collectively reported on the strange woman who had appeared to have the ability to fly in a strange suit, and asked a panel of fashion experts whether or not it was appropriate for a woman to be flying with such a revealing outfit. Fury got a huge laugh out of this, considering that
Carol's outfit wasn't revealing at all, and who gave a shit if it was? She'd saved everyone!

Hypothesized designs began to spread all over the web, and some of them baffled Carol. All of them were much more suggestive than her Kree suit and practically looked like lingerie. The one she disliked the most was this skimpy number, a black spandex suit with a huge yellow lightning bolt on it. She declared it was much more impractical than what she had, that Terran men were weird as hell, and everyone in the room, Fury included, agreed vigorously when it was brought up a few days later.

But finally, they had to decide what should be done next. Carol had a bit of an agenda on her hands.

1. She'd promised to visit Asgard at some point. At least to see Frigga again, who had a lot of answers to questions.

2. The Supreme Intelligence was still out there, and would retaliate for the death of its commander. They did not know, of course, that he'd been demoted and humiliated, and that Ronan had replaced him, but they were right to assume there would be retaliation.

3. Monica had to be trained. By Carol. At the very least, to manage her new and very similar abilities.

4. She'd have to check on Tarnax as well, at least to make sure the Kree weren't tracking them at all.

5. Spend maybe a little bit more time with Maria?

6. Unrelated, but the agenda for Talos specifically: under no circumstances mention to Carol how the name of her mother, Marielle, and the name of her "secret" lover, Maria, happened to be very similar as he observed without thinking to Fury while they collected the rest of the records for Carol to take with her.

7. Get the Daughter, who had overheard this exchange between them, to also not say this.

The biggest priority, longterm, according to Fury, was training Monica. She could not let the photon blasts out full force the way she had the first time, and she had to learn to control it like Carol had. On Earth. No way was she leaving the Terran system, as much she begged her mother to let her. Carol was a fullgrown woman, Monica was still seventeen. Not in the cards.

8. Carol insisted this not be added but Fury kept insisting: visiting her biological family. He would not explain why.

Maria knew, but she was sworn to silence.

9. (Carol's suggestion), that Maria and Monica could come with her.

They got into a pretty bad argument over this, during which Fury first and then Soren slapped Talos hard as they could both times he attempted to re-enter the room saying "ah, your first lover's quarrel."

Carol's points: C-53 seemed to be insanely oppressive towards people for their sexual orientation and gender identity, had a huge percentage of poverty-stricken populations that could be easily solved with redistribution of resources, had a fixation on forcing people with reproductive systems to give birth to children even if they weren't viable, the list went on and on and on. The genocides alone that had happened in the past century were enough to convince Carol that only certain groups
of people on C-53 were worth defending, those who could not defend themselves from the majority.

Maria's points: she had a whole life here, a social life, Monica's social life, her job, her income, these were all things she could not get rid of just to fly off with Carol into the cosmos. She had to help support her aging parents, she had to help out in her community however she could because even if C-53 was as oppressive as it could be, that does not mean you up and run away.

Carol's rebuttal: this didn't mean run forever, this meant just having a better standard of life for yourself.

Maria's rebuttal: what's the point of a better standard for yourself if no one else gets it?

These points were delivered pretty loudly, but after Talos stopped trying to interfere he did comment to both Fury and Soren that they were remarkably healthy in the way that they argued and did not result to petty insults or emotionally manipulative behavior.

Fury retorted that perhaps after everything, he shouldn't be snooping on them on purpose.

So they all left the house again and once again went back to the ship, forcing Monica to go with them, so Talos could begin to try and explain photon energy as best he could.

Maria: "I love you and I want to build my life with you, that's all I've ever wanted, and it hurt me so badly that we weren't allowed to do that, but you might not be the same Carol but I am the same Maria."

Carol: "I've never built a life with anyone, and Old Carol may have done that in secret, but New Carol can take you and Monica somewhere where we'd never have to fear for our lives again, and then everyone who we were afraid of before would be afraid of me."

Maria: "You can't just kill people, Carol."

Carol: "I didn't say kill. Who's in power? They probably have more resources than they need, so I'm going to take it from them and give it out to everyone and then everyone will be happy."

Maria: "Do you really think you could satisfy everyone that way? People would demand more for this and that. Neither of us know how to fix the problems here, Carol. I don't know how. The solutions are never that simple. It doesn't mean people should have to suffer needlessly like this but we can't just decide the fate of the whole planet ourselves."

Carol: "I just don't want to lose any more time with you than I already had. I have no idea how to 'date' or 'be in love' or any of the phrases Fury uses to try and describe it, and I didn't even know another person could like me like that, and I don't want to have any responsibility to anyone now, I just want to go away."

Maria: "How did you not know?"

Carol: "Old Carol knew, probably. I don't know what Old Carol was like. I'm just Vers trying really hard to be your Carol."

Maria: "Do you want to be Vers?"

Carol: "No."
Maria: "Then you're not."

They stood in silence now, Carol crossing her arms uncomfortably, the Kree suit standing out very awkwardly in this very rustic cabin, the bright primary colors clashing with the earthy tones.

They looked away from each other, not knowing what to say, before Carol finally spoke up in a very small voice, saying "Maria?"

"Yes?"

"What was Old Carol like?"

"What do you mean?"

"What was she like? How am I different from her?"

"People change. You're still her. I wouldn't like you at all if you never changed, those are the worst kinds of people."

"What do you mean?" Carol's turn to ask that.

"Carol as a kid was incredibly willing to pick a fight with anyone to compensate with how isolated and lonely she felt as a kid, because I only saw her during the summers, and the rest of the year we had to mail letters to each other."

Maria went to the counter, where one of the many folders containing Carol Danvers As She Once Was, before the Kree, and pulled out the earliest letter she had ever written to her and handed it to her. Glued to it was a picture of her at what must've been around the very beginning of adolescence, wearing overalls, a backwards cap and a shirt with a rainbow on it.

Young Carol was leaning over a strange wooden device, intensely in concentration, slathering a liquid of some kind over a substance made of something else stretched over the wooden structure.

"What's that?"

"That," Maria said, pointing at the wood, "is an easel, and that," pointing at the other substance, "is canvas."

"What do you do with it?"

"You paint. You spread liquid on it in different designs and colors, and then it looks like something."

"What did I paint?"

Maria began digging in the folder again for a few seconds before pulling out another photo, now showing what Young Carol had slathered on the canvas. Young Carol posed with a triumphant smile, paints of all sorts splashed all over her, the older woman that must've been her biological mother giving a forced smile but unable to hide how annoyed she looked.

Carol recognized that what she had painted was a horse, but an unusual one, because it had a horn sticking out of its forehead and why would she paint a horse wrong on purpose?

"What's with the horse?"

"Not a horse. It's a unicorn. Mystical creature from myths and stuff. You were really into those."
"Oh," Carol said, staring at the mystical creature.

"Look at the letter," Maria said.

Carol did.

It read:

"Dear Maria,

Can't you come and take me far away from here? Mom and Dad keep fighting over where the spare change they leave in the jar keeps on going and she accuses him of using it for drinks when it's just me trying to write to you. They won't stop screaming at each other, but it's worth it because I'll go insane if I can't hear from you any longer. They don't know, and if they ever caught me they wouldn't even get mad at me, they'd just wonder why I was wasting my time. I'm never wasting my time.

I know you can't, and it's up to your folks, but I wish I could convince them somehow. I wish I could see New Orleans and the rest of Louisiana, it sounds like the perfect place to me, honestly. I wanna go there for Mardi Gras even though that's only for folks who can legally drink but you and me could go anyway. I wish I knew more Louisiana facts. I will tell you one fact about Massachusetts and how proud I am not to have a 'Bah-stahn' accent and that I don't drive my 'cah' in the 'yahd,' and you can tell me something about Louisiana from now on as long as I'm worthy of your responses.

Fuck, I'm running out of space. Included a picture of me wearing the clothes your grandma got for me. She said she'd pay me five whole dollars for a painting of a unicorn and I know I'm being ripped off but I just want her to smile.

I want to be a part of your life forever.

Love, Carol."

Carol looked up from the hastily scrawled letter to see Maria trying her best to stifle tears, feeling immensely complicated about the proceedings and how the last several days had gone. On the one hand, this meant a lot to Maria, and it felt good to know that at least at one point, Carol had meant something to her. The growing fear that accompanied it was her own inability to become that Carol again, a fear that everyone wanted something totally different from her and she couldn't satisfy anyone's demands.

"What did you think?" Maria asked hopefully, trying to read her expression.

"I guess I stole from my parents a lot," Carol said, slowly growing a smile in spite of herself. She didn't remember any particular instance of theft, but at least it sounded like something she would do, whether it be Old or New Carol.

Maria smiled and said: "always for a good reason."

Carol said, "You can't come with me, can you?"

Maria sighed and said: "I want to, but I can't. I do a lot around here. There's a whole community of folks, just trying their best to make their ends meet. Fury pays me way too much to do piloting jobs for him and I'm more or less rich now, Carol. By Terran standards."
"I keep forgetting this planet has a bizarre obsession with material wealth and punishing people in a caste system."

"Well, I don't know how to break the system, so I work around it however I can. Folks down the road need to terminate a pregnancy, I provide the means to do so. Folks have a barn burn down, I pay to rebuild it. They never know that it's me. They have anonymous donors and fellowships and funds and grants and a billion things that Fury sometimes helps me make up, so that way that crippling debt never occurs, they can begin to rebuild their lives, maybe they can have a better future. I'm not leaving that behind just because I'm in love with someone who has a lot of places to be."

"What does 'in love' mean?"

"I unconditionally care for you. That's what it means."

"Oh. Are you sure it's me or Old Carol?"

"Carol," Maria said, laughing, "There is no Old or New Carol. There's just you. Whatever you happen to be now. Do you really think I'm so naive as to pretend you'll be in this constant stasis and always be the same person? Life happens! Shit happens! I'm very different from how I was when you first vanished. I didn't do any of this 12 years ago. At this point in my life, I'm too jaded to pretend that there's shit like true love or soulmates or anything like that. That's not real, but sometimes you're lucky enough to find someone who you can't stop wanting to be around, and you hope that every day it continues."

"This is all so confusing."

"It's Terran talk, Carol. I'm not going with you. Monica's not going with you, either."

Carol thought for a few seconds, understanding that if not for the semantics and the language barrier, this would feel a lot more meaningful to her than it was, and that Old Carol would understand it perfectly. "Well, maybe not forever, but you could always like...travel?"

"Excuse me?"

"Travel. We can basically go wherever the hell we want, so long as we avoid the Kree. Maybe you can't forever, but a few days? A few weeks? However long you can afford to go? Not to mention that even if you want Monica to have a life here--"

"She has to, Carol. It's her home. I'm not dragging her away from her family or friends, least of all because if you asked her, she'd drop all of that in a heartbeat for you."

"I'm not arguing that. I'm not in a position to make any demands of you, and I'm sorry if I came off that way."

Maria smiled. "No apology needed, I'm not offended. I'm just really tired. There's a lot going on outside of the two of us that's weighing me down, and I know you're trying to help."

She walked to the corner of the room, where a strange device that looked similar to the Terran computer monitors she'd gotten used to, but looked less advanced and thicker.

"And I can prove that there's no Old or New Carol, even with everything you've been through."

She got on her knees and began to press buttons on a rectangular device underneath it, causing a whirring sound to emanate from the machine, causing Carol to stare at it curiously.
Maria looked back and said, "it's got to rewind."

After about a minute of this, largely spent with the two of them sneaking shy looks at each other and seeing who would look away and blush first (it turned out to be largely a tie), the rectangular machine clicked and Maria hit the largest button on it.

Carol slowly sank to the floor, staring at the primitive monitor, leaning up against the desk.

A clearly younger Carol, just out of high school from the looks of it, held up a piece of paper that had words drawn on it.

Maria slid down next to her, giggling a little bit to see the noble warrior hero Kree suit slouched up like that, and whispered into her ear, "it says 'Carol & Maria's Excellent Adventure.'"

And then a younger Maria pushed Carol out of the way, the two of them laughing hysterically, showing those same words on her own slip of paper, except this one had the two names switched.

It began cutting to a whole bunch of moving images. It showed Carol and Maria at a variety of ages, though in some sections Carol wasn't there at all ("we were stationed in separate bases in training," Maria explained awkwardly), which is where a young man began to appear, and in the clips he looked clearly excited to be around Maria but Maria only looked a little pleased to see him.

"That's Frank," Maria said, "Monica's father."

"Oh," Carol said, not wanting to say anything dumb. "Did I know him?"

"You did, he liked you. I haven't told him you're back."

"Are you two..."

"No, No!" Maria said, eyes widening, realizing what she meant, "We haven't been for some time, even before you vanished. We weren't married for very long. I so badly wanted to have that image of that perfect nuclear family even if it's not what I really wanted, and he did too, and we had Monica by accident because we were both curious and didn't plan properly."

"Oh," Carol said again, and without thinking began to lean her head on Maria's shoulder, who kissed her softly on the forehead.

"That's OK, right?"

"Yeah," Carol said, smiling.

"Was he nice?"

"He's a very good man," Maria said, smiling but in a different sort of way. "He was ashamed of himself because he's into both men and women and his parents gave him so much shit about that. He's currently with a woman, but after leaving me he finally got to experiment a bit and he's happier than he's been in a while."

"And like, we didn't violate the marriage, right? Like we were together before Yon-Rogg, right?"

"Sort of," Maria said, still smiling. "I'd repressed it, and after we both started working for Pegasus, which you got me the job for, I'd already divorced him and had Monica, and we were already so close that not a whole lot changed."

"Was I with anyone else before you?"
"I don't think so," said Maria, "you never mentioned anything, and you told me everything. You had said once you were only interested in people if you had a close emotional connection to them. Tell me," she said, motioning with her head at the TV screen, "does that look like two Carols or the same one?"

Carol looked at herself, the bits of footage of the two of them at various ages, and even some of the man she called Frank with them, sometimes with another woman or man intimately holding him. There was a lot of moments she was trying to process, like Carol holding the camera towards herself and stifling laughter as Maria cursed in the background. Carol's locker had been spray painted so that it now read "PRUDE DANVERS."

Footage of a very young Monica curled up and sleeping in Carol's arms, who looked immensely astonished but very pleased.

"I don't even like kids," the Carol on the screen was saying, big smile on her face. "Bunch of goddamn parasites."

"Don't curse in front of our child," Maria said from offscreen, causing everyone to laugh.

"I love this one," said Carol, "This is the only one that isn't a parasite."

Carol and Maria from now watched themselves on the screen, Carol leaning over on Maria's shoulder, not caring how silly it looked for her to be doing this while wearing the Kree suit.

Finally, it stopped, with someone accidentally making a noise against the window, and Carol turned to see Monica, glowing a little blue with her brand of photon energy, pressed up against it, a huge smile on her face.

"Mom and Auntie Carol, sitting in a tree," she began to sing, and then rushed past it, into the door and finally into the room with the rest of them to curl up in her mother's lap.

"Only a matter of time," she said, "You weren't that far gone."

"Shut up, Lieutenant Trouble," Carol said affectionately. "How're you feeling?"

"OK," said Monica, "but I need you to teach me how to use this. Because I'm going to be a superhero."

"What's a superhero?" Carol asked.

"That's not what Auntie Carol is," said Maria, "That's like the guys in the movies with the dumb spandex suits, Auntie Carol is far cooler than a superhero."

"Is this another inside joke? Be respectful, I'm the one with my memories forcibly removed," Carol said.

Maria climbed up from the floor, shifting Monica over onto Carol's lap, and walked to find another rectangular object that looked similar to the one she pulled out from the device attached to the monitor.

"You sure you're not too old for cuddles?" Carol asked, tickling Monica a little.

"Shut up, Auntie Carol," said Monica happily, "you're only as old as you feel."

"I feel like I'm thousands of years old, so I don't appreciate that," Carol said. At this point, she
could see the Daughter entering the room, followed sheepishly by Fury and Talos and Soren.

"Got everything settled?" Talos asked with a sly grin on his face.

"Talos," said Soren with warning in her voice, "you need to be more respectful."

Talos shrugged, Fury said nothing, slinking to the back of the room, the emotionally charged circumstances making him uncomfortable.

The Daughter was holding Goose, who was uncharacteristically content in her arms, giving looks to Fury, which made Carol wonder if she was trying to make fun of him for always seeking her approval.

"This isn't like, private, right?" Fury asked from his perch in the corner.

"No, this is safe for work," said Maria with a smile. "Though only Fury and I are gonna understand it."

She put in the other rectangular shape into the device, and did the same whirring sound as before, then hit the big button.

Just Carol and Maria this time, though both much younger than in the previous video. They looked to be around the beginnings of adolescence here, and there were lots of shots of rows of people in line to a building.

Then a shot of Carol whooping and screaming with joy next to a large piece of paper, and on the paper was a man in a blue suit, similar to that one World War II hero everyone kept crowing about (that Coulson guy, especially), but this blue man had a red cape and the suit didn't look nearly as functional.

Fury spotted the Terran word above it and started to loudly laugh while everyone else looked at him with confusion.

"Man, that explains so much about you, Carol."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't believe you were a goddamn nerd as a kid!"

"What's a nerd?"

"Oh that's gonna take too long to explain."

Monica frowned at him. "I'm a nerd, Uncle Nick."

Fury blanched. "I was just teasing your Auntie Carol."

Monica said, "Nobody gets to call her that but me."

The whole room went "oooooooooooooooooo" and then laughed, and even Fury couldn't stay mad for long at that.

"Besides," Monica said, "it's an old movie. It's really boring. Auntie Carol is a lot cooler."

"What is it?"
"Superman," said Fury, "big movie back in the day."

"Who is Superman?"

"He's not real. He's a guy from another planet who is sent to Earth and decides to protect it with his powers and stuff. See why I'm comparing you to him?"

"I'm not just protecting Earth. I don't even think I could protect any planet on its own. I just want to help everyone I can."

"So you're better than Superman," said Fury with a small smile.

"He's not real, how can I be better than something that's not real?"

"This is so strange," said Talos, "that suit looks like it's made out of toilet paper."

"What's toilet paper?" Soren asked.

"Terrans have to wipe their nether regions with it when they produce excrement."

"Oh," said Soren, "they haven't figured out atom destabilization tech?"

Maria shrugged. "Guess not."

And then: "Wait, what's your equivalent?"

"It deconstructs into an atomic mass that can be then used to power whatever you're wearing or as a source of fuel, by destroying one individual atom at a time? But I'm not the expert on that."

Maria said to Carol: "wait, does your suit do that?"

Carol said: "No? I just, um, hold it until I'm done fighting?"

The whole room burst out laughing at this and even Carol had to laugh, too. That's not a question she was expecting.

"Is this like a big deal on C-53? Excrement?"

"Well," said Fury, "it only is because some people are really into doing it in the--"

"Nicholas," said Maria angrily, "you need to stop saying that around Monica."

"I know what anal is, Mom," Monica said without thinking, and then clapped her hands over her mouth.

After a long silence, Carol then said: "I don't need a translation for that one."

And the whole room burst out laughing again. It was nice be able to joke about these crude things for a change.

Maria finally unpause the video to show how she and Carol had snuck the camera inside the movie theater in order to try and film their reactions to the movie, which consisted of sneaking in through the emergency exit.

It was the camera awkwardly filming a giant screen, with the man in the blue suit and red cape flying.
"That's got to be fake," Carol said, "he can't be that gigantic."

"It's a movie," Maria said, "it's just telling a made up story for fun."

Though there wasn't much more footage, Carol couldn't help but feel a strangely warm feeling looking at the man in the blue suit and the red cape, feeling this sense of inspiration and motivation. It increased further when the two of them ran out of the theater passing the camera back and forth to film each other.

"That was so fucking great!" Young Carol said, practically dancing in the parking lot. "We need to do that!"

"Make movies?" Young Maria said.

"Fly! We gotta fly!"

They both started laughing, and the audience decades later did the same.

Then the footage cut off and Maria of the present day said: "Unfortunately, that led us to the Air Force."

"Military industrial complex ain't your thing, huh?" Fury said, big smile on his face.

"Nope. I'm glad in retrospect the only people I ever killed were Kree," Maria said, "because to actually enter combat, I think that would've broken me more than all the shit we had to deal with during training did."

"Superman would be no match for Captain Marvel, that's all I'm saying," Monica said with a grin.

"You're still trying to make that a thing, huh?" Carol said with a grin in Monica's direction.

"Imagine being the person to come up with the name of the best superhero who's actually real, and not just that stuffy guy from that war who was basically just propaganda."

"Watch it now," Maria said, "your Auntie Carol was a big fan of Captain America too."

"Man," Fury said, "you were such a pure and wholesome kid."

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone! I decided that since I couldn't sleep much after my flight that I'd go off on kind of a tangent and we'll see where that ends up taking us. I don't really have like a set number of chapters and I don't mark em as such, I'm just sort of deciding in the moment how much should make a chapter and where it ends. Still a bit jet lagged so if I'm sounding a little out of it, I do apologize.

I will not be apologizing for the dig to the original Ms. Marvel outfit, I much prefer the modern versions of both the outfit and the person sporting that name. 70s comics were misogynist as hell.

I'm also almost certain that Photon is going to be in the next film, though the big guess is whether or not she will be trained or if she'll already be fully grown and ready. I'm
betting on the latter because I'm suspecting the *Ms. Marvel* film will be Carol training Kamala much like Stark trained Peter Parker in *Homecoming*.

Anyway, we'll get right back to it! Comments, suggestions, anything I can do to improve!

- G
Introducing the One and Only Photon!

Chapter Summary

There's a new superhero in town! with only Steve Rogers and her own Auntie Carol for reference, it seems that the newly empowered Monica Rambeau is a bit eager to get her own superheroic journey started. But it seems that before she can take her place as the one and only superpowered sidekick, the whole gang's gonna have to go on a little venture to somewhere else to get a little closure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"So what's the plan?"

As far as Talos and Soren was concerned, they were on a sort of perpetual vacation until they mutually decided it was time to head back to Tarnax and engage with the rest of their people. They'd both only ever been suited to military command and emergency situations, and despite Carol's initial issues with him, Khn'nr was ultimately chosen to act as a sort of democratically chosen leader of the remnants.

Khn'nr, Carol had to admit, had grown on her. An initial suspicion had given way to a grudging respect, and by the time it was time for the four of them to head to C-53, the two of them had become, somehow, relatively close friends themselves. They only hadn't talked in the last several weeks only because Khn'nr had a huge distaste for tech in general, but he'd promised Carol that she'd have the finest of Tarnax meats as a meal once she returned. He'd even given her a huge hug and lifted her straight off the ground, to the surprise and amusement of all present. This escalated when she misread the gesture and did the same thing right back to him despite how much larger he was than her overall.

He was a wise and just leader, and had no real interest in assuming total power for himself. Skrulls had no need of such things, they were an immensely communal species and tended to share whatever they had so no one was in need. Because everyone shared, there was no need to hoard resources, so nobody was ever really in need in general. If one fell ill and could not work, the others took up the slack, and they were all proud to do it. Carol had really grown to like her time with them, outside of Kree propaganda.

Heading back to Tarnax seemed a little pointless. They had access to Talos and to her beeper if their two greatest military commanders and their favorite Terran were ever needed, instantaneous access over immeasurable lightyears of space and time.

The second option discussed was what to do about the Kree, and in particular, the Supreme Intelligence. With Yon-Rogg dead, there was still Ronan and Korath to contend with, and Korath had been the single best fighter in all of Starforce. He was the one Carol had been terrified to take on, the man was as deeply disciplined as they come. It also didn't help that he was the one Carol "liked" the most out of the whole group before she found out the truth about Yon-Rogg.

Ronan was another story. He was a slithering worm of a Kree, a coward who valued dirty tricks and backstabbing over any sort of fair fight, and she'd been so overwhelmed with her access to her
full photon energy that she'd made short work of the small fleet he'd brought to their only encounter. Ronan might be a worm, but he was no fool and would probably pull out all the stops if that meant getting revenge for how easily it seemed that he had been slighted. He hadn't seen how exhausted Carol had been after the fact, and he was the reason she'd promised herself she'd learn to pace herself in the near future.

The Supreme Intelligence itself had apparently connected with Yon-Rogg and had been the source of his own photon energy, but he'd apparently severed that connection, as far as Talos and Soren could figure out, in order to make his way to C-53 to try and steal the Tesseract from the infamous flerken. Talos and Soren had also gone off and found his Kree pod, hidden in a huge patch of trees near the university campus where he'd launched his attack. It was now resting right next to the Skrull ship, after they and Carol had spent a large amount of time fiddling with it to make sure there were no trackers. Carol could fly between the planets of this solar system in about several hours (at least from one to another), but the Kree pod had jumping capability and would be useful to have around with its added combat attachments.

Then there was the question of Yon-Rogg's modified suit. This was largely what was being done as this conversation was taking place, with Carol and Talos and Soren all fiddling with it now to see exactly what changes the Supreme Intelligence had made.

It sure as hell hadn't been designed to interact with the Tesseract, and Yon-Rogg's own ignorance towards the tech he was using served as his ultimate downfall. Yon-Rogg was a very good combatant and a good strategist but tech had never really been his strong suit.

Pun not intended.

This new addition, which Yon-Rogg had called the Magnitron, bulked him up and also served as a way for his body to be able to process the photon energy provided by the Supreme Intelligence without unloading itself. The real reason why Carol and the others wanted to mess with his suit is because they were considering modifying it for Monica.

A Kree suit, in their society, was an object of the deepest honor and accomplishment, and being able to subvert that tradition by giving the suit of the man who killed Mar-Vell to Lieutenant Trouble felt very fitting. Maria was deeply against this, but she was outvoted by everyone except Fury, who abstained, and Goose, who just barfed up the Tesseract again in response.

"We're going to place that somewhere more secure when we get back," Fury said to Goose, as if she cared.

Yon-Rogg, obviously, was a much larger being than Monica, but it was the only other Kree suit they had and considering the extensive amount of energy she possessed (Carol suspected she was potentially stronger than her considering she'd gotten her abilities directly from the Tesseract, as opposed to a portion of it in her case), they needed something that could in turn be able to conduct itself on that energy source without tearing itself apart.

Carol had to wonder if the Supreme Intelligence itself had something to do with the Tesseract, considering its use as a fuel source for the Kree's lightspeed engines. That had been a thought running through Carol's head, which would explain a lot of why they were so desperate to have it for themselves. Had Mar-Vell stolen it from the Supreme Intelligence? She'd never know.

They made the choice then to clean the suit as best they could (only the Magnitron itself had sustained damage, and Talos and Soren had agreed to take it back to Tarnax to have it further studied), and have Monica try it on. To their surprise, the second she was in it, the suit began to conform itself to perfectly fit her, and the designation had changed from the Kree wording of Yon-
Rogg to "unknown."

They had to check then to make sure that connection to the Supreme Intelligence or Kree surveillance through the suit wasn't still going, which it luckily seemed not to be. It had the same settings as Carol's own suit, which she had ensured wouldn't have that problem.

Then Monica began fiddling with it like she had to give Carol's the warm red/blue/yellow she now called her own personal colors.

At first Monica wanted to make hers look identical but Carol insisted she find her own. She ran through a whole bunch of them, colors swirling and changing as the rest decided what to do. Finally, she decided on an all white design except for the insignia and the metal plating, which were all a very dark shade of grey. She looked like an avenging angel with it on, and giggled loudly as the distinctive mask came up and around her face, but made space for her curls to pop out the back much like the mask would make Carol look as though she was sporting a mohawk every time.

Then the debating derailed itself again as she decided she'd have to decide on her "superhero name," and of course everyone had to stop whatever they were doing to assist her in this important decision.

The names she decided on, which only Talos and Soren eagerly helped her with:

Ms. Marvel! (Carol nixed this, sounded a bit regressive)

Binary! (she wasn't speaking in computer code, was she?)

Spectrum! (Fury got a loud slap from Maria for asking if it was related to the autistic spectrum at all. To Fury's credit, he wasn't even asking to be rude, he was just genuinely confused)

Pulsar! (sounded like a bad hair metal band, according to Talos. Nobody was sure how he'd thought of this).

Finally, Monica went over to a photo of Maria in her Pegasus days, noting that while Carol's callsign then had been "Avenger" (Fury had to note, to Carol's annoyance, that it was based on her love for Captain America and his designation as 'The First Avenger'), Maria's was simply called Photon, which she'd chosen because the name sounded mysterious and imposing.

"I'll be Photon," said Monica.

"I mean, Lieutenant Trouble will always be my choice," said Carol.

"But it's not fitting," said Monica, "this way I can have a cool codename like yours, and I'm paying tribute to my mom."

"That's very sweet of you," said Maria, "but your Auntie Carol is only training you for your own protection, right?" That last word was directed at Carol with a prominently raised eyebrow towards her, causing Carol to blush.

"I mean, that's the plan," Carol squeaked out in a moment of uncharacteristic awkwardness.

"She's still shy, young love is so precious," said Talos to Soren, nuzzling her forehead with his own, causing Carol to blush deeper.

"Call her whatever she wants," said Fury, "We've got more matters to discuss."
"A secret case involving Captain Marvel and her trusty sidekick, Photon?" The masked avenger herself said with glee, the mask covering her face but not her smile.

"No," said Carol affectionately, tapping Photon on the side of her neck so the mask retracted and she was Monica again, "that's gonna have to wait a little while longer, and then I'll try to train you."

"For your protection," said Maria pointedly.

"She should at least learn how to fly," Carol said, "it'll save so much on gas costs. Climate change is no joke."

"What's climate change?" Maria asked.

"Oh man, you shoulda seen the parts of the galaxy I've been in," said Carol, "you guys have that problem too."

"Anyway," said Fury, "I have to be getting back to Bogota, as fun as this extended vacation has been, but you definitely ought to come by and visit before you leave us again for years."

"Not if I can't help it," said Carol.

"We're gonna see the sights for a while," Soren said, still holding Talos tightly around the shoulders, "and you're all more than welcome to join us if you'd like, but business calls."

"Shame I can't be Keller again," said Talos, "I missed his big beautiful eyes."

"As it turns out, I'd really missed you as him," Fury said with a laugh.

"See?" said Talos excitedly. "I fucking told you!"

"Language!" yelled Maria.

"Sorry," said Talos.

"I'm going to Beverly," said Carol.

"Who's Beverly, mate?" Asked Talos. "You got someone on the side?"

"No," said Carol, blushing harder, "it's where I apparently grew up and I'm going back there."

The whole room went silent.

"I have a lot of places I need to be," she said, "but I'm visiting my biological family first."

"I'm going with you," said Maria.

"What about, um, work?" Carol asked.

"When am I officially accepting clients for aviation repair work, Fury?"

"Hell if I know," Fury said. "I'm not your calendar."

"Point being, I'm the best around. They'll wait a couple days for me. You're lucky you had your big traumatic fight on a long weekend."

"What long weekend?"
"It's Easter today."

"What happens on Easter?"

"They celebrate a Jewish carpenter getting killed and resurrected."

"What's a Jewish?"

"I'll explain later, don't get distracted."

"Did I celebrate this?"

"You were forced to as a kid, but you stopped pretty early on. Long story short, I'm going with you, and I know that means that Monica is going to go with us--"

"You better believe it," Monica said with a wink. "And I can get Uncle Nick to go too."

"No, you cannot," said Fury, "I am the deputy chief of a SHIELD branch, I can't go running off willy-nilly just because I made the mistake of befriending the most convincing people alive."

"Watch me," said Monica, sounding very confident still.

"You can hitch a ride with us," said Talos, "Beverly can be the very first part of our trip!"

"No, guys, I'm not trying to make this into a thing, I was just going to confront them and then figure out how I could possibly figure out a way to train Monica to control her--"

"It's gonna be a one day vacation," said Maria, "and you said you wanted more time with me, right?"

"Yes," said Carol, "but this won't be a happy reunion."

"We can say hi to my grandfather, he'd love to see you."

"Maria, that's very nice, but--"

"Carol, Carol, Carol," Maria said, taking her in her arms and holding her close. She then whispered into her ear, not realizing how good Talos and Soren could hear, "and it does mean we'll end up being alone at some point."

Carol, not facing anyone else, blushed, but Talos and Soren took all of their willpower not to laugh.

"OK," said Carol, meekly and a little overwhelmed by that last comment, not wanting to think about it. "If you want to go, we'll go, but I promise you it's not going to be fun. Plus Fury isn't gonna go, at least."

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! Monica Rambeau in the comics has had a heck of a lot of names, but I figured for the sake of clarity that in this hopefully-still-canon world, she will be known by her original name of Photon. She was even a Captain Marvel of her own back in the day and will likely get the helm again a few decades from now, but for now she's gonna be Photon, it's been decided.
She'll have more to do in a little bit, as I'm seeing a real Wolverine/X-23 vibe emerging between the two of them regardless if it's me typing away or folks like Boden/Fleck who get to make the real thing!

And we're about to be off to Beverly, Massachusetts! Like I said before, it's a real city, close to Boston, and if there's anyone reading who happens to be living there or has lived there, I'll see how accurately I can portray the town and the people living in it. The residents we are about to meet aren't so nice, but they're not reflective of the town as a whole, nor do I intend it that way! AAAAAA

- G
Good Times on the Triskelion

Chapter Summary

Before the gang can head off to Carol's hometown, they've got one more stop to make before then, and that's a personal debriefing from some of the planet's most prominent figures. Someone such as Carol is sure to draw some attention, and there's secrets of her own she'd rather not have them know. But luckily for the gang, the one doing the debriefing might be a friendlier face than they were expecting...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fury went.

What no one else had figured out until a little later is that during the six years Maria and Monica had been flying to America's capital in order to visit him and help with his then assignment trying to create an official record of the woman who destroyed the alien fleet, Monica had spent a lot of time that they thought was her messing around on her Game Boy actually wandering the halls of the SHIELD Triskelion.

She was caught plenty of times, and was already listed as a relative of Fury's, and he'd just been through such a traumatic experience having his eye supposedly torn out while being tortured by the Kree way back in '95 that people just sort of let it slide and she wandered all over the place, not entirely understanding what she was seeing. A good thing, because she was accidentally witnessing a lot of the formation of HYDRA's reascension within SHIELD. Several years later, when both SHIELD and HYDRA collapsed at the same time, Monica's saved records she'd made of the place as a personal project made her an unnamed and anonymous whistleblower without her knowledge as Fury used them to prove his innocence and Alexander Pierce's complicity.

Natasha Romanoff, the named whistleblower, would never understand how Fury had convinced a mystery employee to give him that much info, and never learned the name of this unexpected hero, who herself wasn't even aware that it had happened.

So she wandered, and she walked right into the office of then-director Alexander Pierce one day.

Pierce may have been obsessed with eugenics, but he was just as human as anyone else even if he was a egomaniacal maniac and took quite a liking to the kid, and heard lots of exploits about Nick Fury, the deputy chief of Bogota, and just how goddamn brave and wonderful he was.

Did Nick Fury become the director of SHIELD because of Monica's proud endorsement over a period of months as she talked him up innocently to a bunch of higher-ups? They'd never admit to it.

The upside was that as a result of this, for some reason Fury was granted an extra day off without knowing why.

The downside is that they requested very sternly that this Carol Danvers come in and get officially briefed before then, otherwise they'd detain Fury and both Rambeaus, no matter how adorable that
kid was.

Talos and Soren went too, deciding to disguise themselves as Keller and a young redheaded woman who had only just been hired on after defecting from the defunct Soviet Union. She was immensely young and only a little older than Monica herself, but apparently was a trained killer. Soren hadn't known this, but the real redheaded woman had greeted Fury very enthusiastically, with the spunk of a new employee to a new job, and had made Maria laugh behind her back.

So for a little while, this Natasha Romanoff would serve falsely as Keller's assistant. Keller himself hadn't gotten into any trouble, he'd just retired early on after a stress-related stroke and went back to being a defense contractor, so his "visit" along with Fury was meant purely to endorse his reputation and to help out this Carol Danvers any way he could.

Two people sat behind the desk. Both of them were people Monica had actually talked to occasionally over the years, though Fury and Maria did not know that.

The first was the chiseled older man known as Alexander Pierce, the director of SHIELD. The second was a youthful looking woman who despite clearly being older than everyone else, still had an energy that made her feel like the youngest in the room.

Her badge read MARGARET CARTER, but Fury warned everyone beforehand to call her by her title, Madam Carter.

Carol hadn't shown up in the Kree suit, though she'd spent the flight in the Quadjet that Maria herself flew, the Skrull ship resting comfortably in the hangar, trying out a new trick with the photon energy that she was going to use in case things escalated for whatever reason and Fury was compromised. These were the most powerful Terrans on the planet if they could tell Fury what to do.

Monica had tried to replicate the trick and nearly blown the sides off the Quadjet because of her still uncontrolled energy. Carol had promised her that after this and going to Beverly, she'd show her how to do it properly.

Carol felt strange around this Madam Carter, a strange desire to do whatever she said and listen the way she had felt around Frigga. How a simple Terran could create that response without doing much at all was very confusing.

Pierce said, once they all sat down (everyone was wearing the most formal attire they could find, Goose sporting a black bow tie):

"Identify yourselves."

"Nicholas Joseph Fury, deputy chief of SHIELD's Bogota branch."

"Benjamin Keller, former director of SHIELD, former deputy chief of SHIELD's Atlanta branch."

"Maria Rambeau, independent contractor."

Pierce frowned. "Then how are you in the building?"

"I'm a pilot. That's the independent contracting. My documents are in order."

Carol couldn't help but give her a strange look, considering how formal of a tone she was using in comparison to when she was with trusted company, but Maria only gave her a warm smile in response and clasped her hand with her own.
"Who is she flying planes for, Nicholas?"

"She's flying planes for me, Director Pierce, Madam Carter--"

"Peggy will be fine, Nicholas," Peggy said, speaking out loud for the first time, smiling warmly at Fury.

"And what are you doing here, Keller? Your presence wasn't requested."

"Understandable," said Talos as Keller, relishing the role. "But Fury has long been a trusted agent and loyal to the cause, and I wanted to make sure he was given every level of endorsement I could possibly give."

"And you'll endorse Miss Rambeau as well?"

"I'll endorse anyone Nicholas endorses, Director Pierce. Ever since he saved me in Havana, I could never possibly do enough to repay the debt that I owe him." Talos, making the joke that had compromised him back when he and Fury had been opponents, winked at Fury and the muscles above Fury's damaged and covered left eye twitched back in response.

"And who are you?" Director Pierce said, looking in the disguised Soren's direction.

"Ahem" Soren said, trying out the new voice, "Natasha Romanoff, Director. Former Director Keller insisted that I shadow him during this particular meeting to get a better idea of the protocol around here."

"You've defected from the former Soviet Union, correct?"

"Yes sir, eager to do what I can to serve this country."

"Your accent is impeccable," Pierce said, smiling warmly at her, and (to everyone's discomfort) looking at her a little lecherously.

"Thank you sir," Soren said, blanching a little bit, which only made it more convincing.

"And you endorse Agent Romanoff despite her past history?"

"I do," said Talos, "she was recommended to me by both Deputy Chief Fury and one of the agents under his purview, an agent going by the name of Clint Barton. She'd make an excellent asset to the cause so I granted her access using my own security clearance."

Fury looked at him, face impassive but his remaining eye showing confusion, but Talos briefly made a look of "I'll explain later" and they both turned back to Pierce, impassive as ever.

"And, Fury, why are you bringing your house pet to this meeting?"

Goose, as if she was responding, proceeded to puke up the Tesseract onto the glass table with a loud clang, tentacles exposing themselves in the process, and letting out a huge burp. Everyone but Pierce and Peggy had to stifle laughter and mostly succeeded.

"That," said Fury, regaining his composure, "is why."

"I see," said Pierce, staring at the Tesseract, dripping and soaked in flerken spittle, "I suppose it was most prudent of you."

"That's the artifact you recovered after this alien species, this Kree, tried to steal it from us?" Peggy
asked Fury quietly.

"Yes, Madam Carter," Fury said, "this creature, in the shape of a feline, is one of two things I've seen that can handle it."

Monica barely opened her mouth to proudly tell everyone she could handle it as well, but Carol squeezed her hand with the hand not being held by Maria and gave her a warning look before saying loudly, "and the other thing is me."

She stood up completely from her seat, knowing it would draw attention to her needlessly but willing to appear awkward and uncoordinated if it kept Monica's secret safe.

"You must be Carol Danvers," said Peggy, "I've been very eager to meet you."

"The pleasure is all mine, um, Madam Carter," Carol said in response, bowing her head slightly and giving Fury a questioning look.

Fury only stroked Goose's fur and shrugged.

"So why is your personal pilot here?" Pierce asked, gesturing towards Maria in a symbol of dismissal.

"I hired her as my personal pilot because she's the first person to successfully operate a Quadjet and assisted in the re-capture of the Tesseract back in 1995," said Fury, "she's one of three Terrans to encounter extraterrestrial life and survive."

"Terrans?"

Fury internally cursed at himself and said, "Earthlings. Us. Humans. That's what the Kree call us."

Pierce looked at Carol. "And you're this alien, a Kree?"

"No," said Carol, "not quite."

Pierce said, "Explain."

Carol said, "hasn't Fury already told you this?"

A vein in Pierce's forehead, one that seemed to be designed to twitch whenever a direct order wasn't immediately obeyed, proceeded to twitch with intensity before Peggy said, calmly, "he hasn't told me. So you tell me."

Something about her tone made Carol desperately want her approval for some reason, and she began to relay, as best she could, all that she could remember to Peggy. For some reason, she trusted Peggy implicitly but felt distinctly nervous around Pierce. But Fury seemed to have an air of deference and he'd never intentionally deceive her, so hopefully he was on the up-and-up.

Carol didn't share everything, of course. She had left out any mention of any relationship, physical or intimate or otherwise, between herself and Maria because she figured that draconian law that applied elsewhere must apply here too. She of course did not mention that Monica had now developed similar abilities to her own and those that were possibly even more powerful than before.

And finally she finished, still having given out the vaguest possible version of the story, ending with her being forced to execute Yon-Rogg after he broke free of his restraints and Fury attempted
to give his own life to make sure no one else was injured. Everyone who had actually been there knew the real story, and Monica sadly hung her head at this and Peggy noticed, and asked her why.

"Um," Monica said, "I never would've been able to live with myself if something had happened to Uncle Nick."

Even Pierce's face expressed a hint of sympathy at that, even if Carol still couldn't keep her eyes off of him, something in her gut was telling her something was very off about this man and she wasn't really sure why.

"You ought to be commended for your conduct, Deputy Chief Fury," Peggy said, smiling warmly at him, to which Fury gave a curt nod and a small smile back, suggesting that he definitely knew of her but wasn't very familiar with her.

"Miss Danvers," Peggy then said, "You ought to be commended as well for your role in the defense of this planet. It may have occurred outside the jurisdiction of the United States government, but I would say that it's one of those rare cases where you had no other options except to act, and so I will personally recommend you are not charged with any crimes or misdemeanors."

Both Pierce and Carol said "What?" but then Carol said "What for?" and Pierce said "Madam Carter, this is highly irregular."

Pierce looked at her then and said "What for? Miss Danvers, I admire your tenacity, but you did engage an enemy fleet by yourself--"

"Not by myself, Agent Fury and Miss Rambeau were there as well."

"What do they have to say for themselves?"

"What I have to say for myself," Maria said with a sly smile at Pierce, "is I was exercising my Second Amendment rights."

Peggy, to her credit, nearly laughed at this but put a hand to her mouth in a show of mock deference. Carol inferred that she seemed to only be tolerating the presence of Pierce, despite his high station, and in spite of Fury's clear admiration for the man, Carol had to admit she was liking Peggy more and more.

Pierce stopped dead in his tracks, the gears in his brain whirring, and Carol accidentally didn't help matters when she turned to Maria, looking thoroughly confused, asking "What's the Second Amendment?"

The vein on Pierce's forehead began to twitch again as he said slowly and deliberately: "Fury, tell me she's joking."

"Sir," Fury said, trying to get the room to calm down, "I promise you she's not trying to mess with you. She did have her memory forcibly altered and removed by an alien civilization and my report more than proves the validity of everything she's said. I will provide as many sources and documentations of evidence as you need to back her up on this."

"You wouldn't happen to have access to this, would you, Miss Danvers?" Pierce asked.

Carol shook her head. "They didn't use a device, they inserted me inside the Supreme Intelligence--"

"Which is the AI running this Kree civilization--"
"On the planet Hala, yes," Carol said sweetly, smiling at him again.

"I find that very hard to believe."

"I mean, you've got plenty of their tech here, you must've spent some time recovering the debris and you must recognize that it all came from somewhere and Hala is the somewhere it came from."

"Yes, but--"

"So the Supreme Intelligence converted the entire planet into a power source for itself, and it takes the people it's captured and uses itself to re-arrange our minds as it sees fit to make us better soldiers for it."

"How is that feasible?"

"Feasible?" Carol asked, genuinely confused. "It's a much more efficient method than what you do. I've read a little into it, though yours only comes in paper and ink, and it seems very inefficient. Training soldiers is such a simple thing on there, it worked well enough on me. All the dehumanization doesn't have to occur through systemic torture and elimination of the self when there is no self."

"Are you suggesting," Pierce said with the vein twitching even more, "that the United States military doesn't know how to train its soldiers properly and this alien nation does? We've won every war we've ever fought in."

"Carol, stop--" Fury tried to say, but Carol was already too far into her spiel to be stopped.

"You lost the last two, actually," she noted, "and those were mainly proxy wars for resources, which the Supreme Intelligence doesn't need. Now to be fair," she said, smiling pleasantly, genuinely enjoying the conversation and completely unaware of how Pierce seemed to be reacting to all this, "you've got to be pragmatic and conclude the Supreme Intelligence is the far more dangerous of the two, yours only affects one planet while the Supreme Intelligence threatens the entire known galaxy. Which is why I haven't done anything about it, and why no other interested parties have interfered. But believe you me, the second the Terrans figure out true interstellar travel is the moment the Kree or someone else would destroy the entire planet in a heartbeat."

"And you'd let it happen?"

"Oh no," said Carol, "not if I could help it. I've grown to like too many individual beings here, plus I am from here so the sentimental factor also applies. For the most part, Terrans as individuals are pleasant enough folks trying to make ends meet in a system that seems designed to favor a very limited set of characteristics."

"Pierce," said Peggy, "I think I will conclude matters here, just with Carol. The rest of you," she said, "are free to wait outside."

"You're ejecting me?" Pierce asked.

"I'm ejecting everyone but her," Peggy said, "this is going to go nowhere otherwise."

"Madam Carter, she means no offense, she hasn't been a proper citizen of Earth in some time and--"

"Fury," said Peggy with force, "I hardly think I'd win in a fight against her."
Fury sighed, and motioned for everyone else to join.

"You're kicking out the current and former Directors of SHIELD, Madam Carter?" Pierce said one more time, the supposed world leader looking very small and childlike in her presence.

"You were the Directors of SHIELD, but I did found it," said Peggy, "you don't mind, do you, Director Keller?"

"Not at all," said Talos with a smile, "Always a pleasure to see you, Margaret." He motioned for Soren as Romanoff to get up and follow him, Maria and Monica being the last out, the former giving her a worried look, the latter looking disappointed she couldn't stay.

It was just the two of them now.

"That's not Keller," said Peggy, "because he called me Margaret. If there's one thing you must know about me, it's that I despise the name Margaret."

"Um," said Carol, "what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing," said Peggy, "because Keller wouldn't ever stand up for anyone, he was concerned for himself first and foremost."

"I didn't mean to insult your Director."

"He's not mine, dear, he's the country's," Peggy said as if that would be less confusing.

"Well either way, I guess he's a person of some influence and he doesn't enjoy being talked down to."

"Carol, you're in the unique position of being someone that very few people here pose a threat to," said Peggy, "and of course they want to take you down a peg so that they can feel like they're on your level."

"That," Carol said, the thought making her think of Yon-Rogg, "is something I'm still getting used to."

"Pierce was the World Security Council's choice, not mine. I had an unusual candidate in mind, and that was Nicholas Fury."

"He'd be good at it," Carol said, "possibly the only person who would be good at it."

"I was the first Director of SHIELD," Peggy said helpfully.

"Well, I didn't know that--"

"You see?" Peggy said, smiling wider at her. "You could snap me like a toothpick if you felt like it, but for some reason you're still deferring to me. That skill takes a while to pick up, and for all your strength, it's one that would serve you well."

"I've always had an issue with authority figures."

"You do, and that's why the ones who don't demand your respect are the toughest to talk to. Pierce is what I'm sure you were familiar with in your own training, on Earth or otherwise. All bombast and strutting on his own two feet, aggression and dominance his main tactics. Doesn't work very well on you. It doesn't work very well on me, either. Our strength comes from further within, Carol."
"It's, may I say, very maternal, the way you talk to people."

"Well parental, I like to use general terms for that. The best parents don't have to demand anything from their children. The best parents simply quietly convey the tone that they will be listened to no matter what, as if you don't even have the choice. You just have the added physical strength that would've been so helpful to me."

"Madam Carter--"

"Peggy."

"Peggy, what am I really doing here?"

"Well, I'm here to make my formal introduction to you, and Pierce insisted on butting in. But that's all, I wanted to introduce myself to you, because it was mandated that you have a government contact to 'keep you in line,' as farcical as that might sound. They all scoffed when I personally volunteered, but it's also because I highly identify with a person who will sacrifice themselves to try and protect those who cannot protect themselves."

"I uh," Carol said, feeling odd for all the witty retorts she didn't know how to respond with suddenly, "I'm not exactly sure how I would describe myself other than a bad person who wants to make amends."

"Amends for what?"

"I killed a lot of people as a Kree."

"I killed a lot of people as a government operative. But you and I both know there's no absolution for such deeds, and that often those seeking the greatest good once did a lot of the opposite of it. I have lots of regrets, and that comes with the territory."

She moved over to sit in the seat next to Carol, taking her hand in her own, making Carol flinch a little, causing Peggy to let go.

"You won't be here long, will you?"

"No," Carol said, "I'm bound to leave pretty soon. I can't just be here. I can't really turn the tide or magically show up and fix everything, but I know I can help somewhere."

"That's fine," Peggy said, "but I'm required to tell you not to interfere with any government interests. Even as futile of a measure as that sounds, even as much of a waste it was to bring you here. They want you on the record so they can feel like they've told you off and they all can congratulate themselves for how strong and powerful they are."

"That sounds pretty universal."

"Most people in power," Peggy said, "are highly insecure. Keep that in mind. So I did them the favor of telling you because I knew if any of them tried it, you'd laugh right in their face."

Carol laughed at this.

"See? So it's better to hear the bluster and bombast from me, who genuinely doesn't care where you go, but it also gives me a way to avoid most of the meetings. I don't want to be around them. So now you're going to be my personal project, a liaison from Earth to the rest of the galaxy, spreading the American way wherever you go."
"You realize I'm not going to do that even if you try to force me, right?"

"I highly doubted it. But it makes them feel good to hear it. That's all bureaucracy is sometimes, people controlling the lives of thousands at a time and getting off at the idea of being able to change their lives on a whim. You're very scary to them because they have no way of telling you what to do. So I'm going to tell you what to do, and then you're going to ignore me, and they'll be so consumed by this proxy war they're going to cook up pretty soon that they'll forget all about you until you interfere again."

"You're not going to stop the proxy war?"

"I will most certainly try. But I expect to fail. You'd think after founding the agency I would be treated with respect, but there's a lot of 'oh, well you see, there's a lot to these things' and so on and so forth. Lots of people will die. I will try to minimize the death as much as I can, while seeing to it to help you as much as you need it to be able to truly stop things from getting awful. The worst threats to our planet come from outside, and you'll have to be our first line of defense in some way or another."

"I'm going to need some things in return."

"Helping your country not enough?" But Peggy was still smiling.

"Nothing for me, personally. I don't need anything else. I need to make sure Maria and Monica are taken care of."

Peggy looked out the clear glass window to see Maria and Monica staring back at her through it, and smiled at them both.

"I see," said Peggy.

Carol blanched, realizing she may have admitted too much.

"Well, at the very least, they won't be wanting in terms of their living expenses and they will be spared a lot of inconvenience. No one will go crawling up their backsides about you or anything else. It would be very easy to tell if I don't keep my word," she said, still smiling, "and you could always just kill me if I lied. I'm not long for this world anyway."

"You look pretty healthy to me."

"Compared to you? Practically in the grave. I'm sure the something-or-other that makes you do all of that makes you live longer too."

"Maybe."

"I wanted to meet you," Peggy said. "And I was hoping I could talk you into an arrangement."

Carol liked her. Despite the disagreement, she was at least being honest.

"No dice," Carol said. "Nothing personal."

"No offense taken," said Peggy, "but I'm obligated to ask you to reconsider."

"To be totally honest," Carol said, "I'm probably going to do lots of things this government isn't going to agree with."

"Just think about the common folk, Carol," Peggy said, "I'm in no position to stop you. But let your
"I don't want to hurt anyone," Carol said. "I don't want to kill anyone. I don't like bullies no matter where they're from."

And then all at once something clicked and she was a small child again, and her father Joseph Danvers stunk of 'cheap beer' and had her sat down on the living room floor, hands on her shoulders, not letting her move, as they watched an old movie called **THE CAPTAIN AMERICAN ORIGIN STORY** and Steven Rogers' head sat atop a puppet body simulating his pre-serum self as he said those exact same words to an actor playing Abraham Erskine (the name flashed in her head too, everything flashed back), he said those words and despite the crippling hatred she felt for her father forcing her to watch, those words did stand out to her but what if the person who wanted to show you the movie about the man who stopped bullies was a bully--

"Steven said that."

"What?" Carol blinked. Peggy was smiling, but looked a little concerned.

"Steven Rogers. That line. It's something he said often. Mythologized in the old movies."

"I'm...more aware of him than I was."

"You grew up here, you must've heard of him."

"I'm remembering more now."

"I knew him, did you know that?"

"No?" Carol said but then something clicked again, because Joseph Danvers was obsessed with Rogers, the "man's man," his study and his office and even part of the master bedroom has been plastered with all sorts of Rogers memorabilia, the ancient action figure handed down to him by his father, the posters, the old movies on reels of film he'd collected over the years, all of it. But what clicked again was one of the rarest reels in her father's collection, the other one he'd made her sit through and forced her to hold it before she was allowed to go to the bathroom because "you need to see it all."

This one had no name, because it was a newsreel made sometime in 1943, that date stuck out because he made her memorize it, and because it had been nicknamed in his Rogers enthusiast group "The Woman On The Photograph," after a photo Rogers kept in a locket and had looked at exactly once through all of the newsreels they'd made her and her brothers Steven and Junior watch with them.

She remembered two more men now: one was quiet and said not much at all but catalogued his details on Rogers with a lot of enthusiasm, and that he went by the name Phillip Sheldon, and the others was a loudmouth who loved to drink with her father and his name was William Tatters, they both worked as journalists and this fueled the fire, as her father put it--

"Well I suspect you might've seen me in one place before," said The Woman On The Photograph, several decades removed.

"Oh," said Carol. "Um...were you two close?"

"Very," Peggy said, "very close."

A knock on the door suddenly, and a somewhat older but strangely strong-looking older man stood
at the door, wearing all cardigans and resulting in Peggy letting out an uncharacteristic giggle.

"Madam Carter," said the man with a smile, walking in, and the two of them kissed much more deeply than Carol had expected two Terrans to kiss in public. She couldn't help but look in Maria's direction, and give her a confused look.

Maria shrugged, Monica made a show of pretending to gag. Fury and Talos (as Keller) and Soren (as Romanoff), stood chatting near the entrance when Soren suddenly ran off and the real Romanoff approached, looking much more shy than she had been.

"My apologies," Peggy said as soon as she and the man had disentangled, "I didn't realize my husband was going to visit me today."

"Grant Buchanan," said the man, sticking out a hand. His hair was long and he sported a very bushy beard, but Carol found him immensely familiar as well.

Carol shook it, and normally she had to severely limit herself so she wasn't accidentally shattering people's hands, but this Grant Buchanan was the first Terran she'd encountered who squeezed back quite hard, not hard enough to hurt but hard enough to notice, and not in the domineering way someone like Pierce would shake hands.

She also noticed, as they shook hands, that he was giving Romanoff a strangely wistful look, but it wasn't the lecherous one that she'd seen from Pierce but rather a strangely paternal look.

"Do you know her?" Carol asked, motioning with her head towards Romanoff.

"I've been mentoring her as well as a few others," said Buchanan in a voice that sounded like he was talking slightly higher pitched than he would have normally, but Terrans had weird quirks.

"I see," said Carol, still unable to shake the weird feeling.

"If you must know, it wasn't only me who had vouched for you, Grant did as well. He took a look into your file himself and determined that you should hardly be interfered with."

"Why all this for someone you don't know?"

"I admire people taking action for others," said Buchanan, "I'm something of a sentimental sort deep down."

"What do you do? Do you also work for SHIELD?"

"As a consultant," Grant said, "though a while back I was more heavily involved. I train recruits, keep a lookout for potential threats, make sure everyone's aware of what's to come. I do all sorts of things."

"Hmm," said Carol, the strange feeling regarding Buchanan still remaining. It was not the same as her feeling towards Pierce, who gave her an ominous feeling, rather that he had something to hide but he seemed benevolent enough. She had no feeling of danger.

"Anyway," said Buchanan, "I know you won't be here much longer but please visit when you've got a chance. I have a very inconsistent schedule and there's certain days I absolutely can't be here, but I'd love to talk to you longer, with Peggy."

"About?"
"About what it's like to save the world, but mostly what to expect," Buchanan pointed vaguely upwards with a finger, "out there."

"Sure," said Carol, eyebrow arched the way Maria liked to when she was confused. "I suppose I can pay you both a visit when I'm back from wherever I need to be."

"Take all the time you need. I'd also rather not meet at the Triskelion next time around. How long do you estimate you'll be gone?"

"Well I've got a few places to go to in order to cover up loose ends--"

"A month? A year?"

"Let's say a month."

"Wonderful," Buchanan pulled out a notepad from his jacket and began to scribble on it furiously with an accompanying pen, holding it stable on Peggy's back, who couldn't stop laughing. He then stopped and handed the note to her.

"What's that mean?"

"32 days from now, at around 10 AM EST, which is this part of the country, you should meet us in New York. Really wonderful shawarma joint that just opened up that I've really wanted to try."

"Shawarma?"

"You'll love it. Invite them too," Buchanan said, gesturing to Maria and Monica, "they're more than welcome if they can make it. And if for whatever reason, you're occupied that day, we'll figure something out through Fury, I guess."

"OK?" Carol said, still thoroughly confused but making a mental note of it in case she was somehow free in a measurement of time she still wasn't entirely familiar with.

"I don't want to be rude, but we were talking about Steven Rogers--"

They both burst out laughing, Buchanan's laugh deeper than his speaking tone.

"Well, I don't know what's so funny, but Madam Carter seemed to have a fling with him--"

They just laughed even harder, and from outside the room, Maria and Monica's faces looked even more confused.

"What's so funny?"

"We've had a long time to have that discussion, Carol," Buchanan said, "No one's ever brought it up so bluntly before. You've got to be very secure in order to be with this one." Peggy smiled and lightly punched him on the shoulder.

"I see," Carol said, still feeling confused. "I'm sorry if I'm acting strange, my memory is...wonky."

"No problem at all, Carol," Buchanan said. "Join us at that time if you can. We'll be right there then. My treat."

And without another word, they both proceeded to each give Carol a hug, Peggy kissing her affectionately on the cheek, and then proceeded to walk out, hand in hand, off and away to somewhere else entirely.
"They're odd, even for Terrans," Carol said, gingerly touching the red lipstick mark on her face, before leaving herself to rejoin Maria and Monica and to begin heading out. Soren had changed appearances again, looking exactly like that weird next door neighbor of Maria's, but now decked out in a suit.

The real Romanoff, now that Carol had a chance to talk with her, seemed to only be a couple years older than Monica, quite young but apparently quite qualified for the job. She eagerly shook Carol's hand the second she made it to the others.

"It's such an honor to meet you, Miss Danvers," she said, sounding like she'd discovered fire, "I can't believe I'm really here with the Captain Marvel, right here, right now."

"What do you mean by--" Carol began to ask, but a guilty look from Monica explained how Romanoff had heard of this name.

"Um," she said instead, "the honor is all mine."

Romanoff let out a little squeal, strange because apparently she was a hired killer of some sort, but judging from Carol's own past, she may not have been allowed to express this part of herself often and decided to not say anything.

"I can't believe you got to meet my boss, one of them," her voice also sounded noticeably different from the others, she'd have to ask Maria or Fury about that later. "Fury is kinda sorta one of them--"

"I'm not your boss, Romanoff, I'm just familiar with you through how you got here."

"Yes, right, of course, but you're higher up in the food chain. But it's been Buchanan who has been helping me train for SHIELD, can you believe that Peggy Carter's husband is the one who vouched for me. She's the famous one of the two here, but he's apparently been on all these top secret missions and he selected me, personally, vouched for me when no one else did!"

"That's great," Carol said with some genuine enthusiasm, as Romanoff was so excitable that you couldn't be too mad at her.

"Do you think you could recommend me?" Romanoff asked.

"Romanoff," Fury said with a warning in his voice.

"What do you mean?" Carol asked.

"A lot of people don't think I should be here because I'm from Russia. The former Soviet Union, you know?"

"Um, yes."

"Well, they keep demanding more recommendations and even though you're not from SHIELD, I'm sure you carry a lot of weight around here and I know we've never met but you know Fury and he's the best--"

Fury just quietly sighed at all of this.

"I uh, I don't think I can have that talk until I've taken care of things elsewhere," Carol said, sounding as diplomatic as she could, "but I'm not against the idea, I just need to make sure it's OK with Madam Carter and her husband. I don't plan to have a lot to do with SHIELD, not that there
aren't good people in it--"

"Oh no, I get it, you're like a full-on superhero, right? That's what they call you guys who do the
really cool, um, shit? But you don't need an agency like SHIELD to have your back. I totally get it."

"I'll talk to Fury, I'll talk to Buchanan and Madam Carter when I get back, I can't make any more
promises than that."

"Thank you so much, just for considering! I'll make the best possible impression when you get
back!" Romanoff squealed a little, shook her hand, waved at everyone else, and began to scamper
off. Carol noticed, out of the corner of her eye, Monica giving her a extended look and then trying
to look as if she hadn't done anything.

"She's plucky," said Fury, "but watch years of service take that right out of her. She seems alright,
maybe she'll last."

"I'm not used to people liking me that much," Carol said.

"I like you," Maria said, wrapping an arm around her, which made Carol feel a little better.

Chapter End Notes

God, I was very nervous for this part, as it was time to introduce Peggy Carter and my
best approximation at her husband, who I have called Grant Buchanan because it
sounds appropriately distinguished. I don't know if he counts as a OC since he's based
off a character who exists in the MCU but has never been seen, but we'll be seeing a
little bit more of both of them. Peggy's the most difficult to write by far, because she's
such a particular character and I don't want people reading this and not seeing Hayley
Atwell!

I might be skipping Chapter 13 due to a superstition thing, or I might do something
kinda weird for that, I'm not sure what yet! Getting used to being back home is still
getting to me a little!

I got to see Captain Marvel again on the plane so that's given me some more ideas of
where we could go with this, though I am trying as hard as possible to make it
somewhat canon. I'm terrific of the day where it eventually stops being that way. I'll
think of a way around it!

Anyway, comments, concerns, suggestions, let the comments have it if you've got
anything to say!
That Perfect Little Family Called The Danvers

Chapter Summary

Closure isn't always closure. Reunion isn't always reunion. Sometimes no memory at all can be a blessing when what came before was an absolute nightmare. Carol Danvers might very well be the strongest Terran alive, but you don't always need brute strength. Nothing can hurt like the families we're supposed to be bonded with, and nobody can love us like the families we had to find on our own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A lot had happened and the day wasn't over yet. The Skrull ship flew from Washington to the Boston area, everyone else but Talos taking a well-needed nap (the Daughter had stayed on the ship, and was now snuggled up with Mom on one of the cots), so Carol slid into Soren's normal seat to think and because Talos was the best to casually chat with.

"Wild day, eh love?"

"Tell me about it."

"You know, mate, I never expected that a Kree that I kidnapped and probed the memories of, or at least the ones I could find, would end up being a friend to us like you have been."

"Hmmph," said Carol, but she was smiling at that, "good first impression you made."

"There she is, there's the jokester," Talos said with a wink.

"The jokester has mixed feelings about this."

"The jokester doesn't have to go to see Mum and Dad."

"Well yeah, but I need closure. I need to see them as they are now, whether it sparks anything or not. I can go alone, I'm sure I could fly the rest of the way."

"Nah, love, Soren and I need some time to be tourists and the Daughter can maintain her shapeshifting for only a few hours at a time, hence why she couldn't join us in SHIELD. But looking around a proper Terran city without being spotted, that's something she's really wanted to do. We want to make a record of what it's like on every habitable planet we don't already know of."

"Kh'n'r would love that."

"Kh'n'r can lick my arsehole if he thinks he can talk me out of my long-deserved vacation."

Carol burst out laughing at this, so hard that the Daughter stirred for a second in her sleep and they both looked back at her, feeling guilty about it, but she settled back into her mother's embrace.

"I never asked you, but how did you and Soren meet?"
"We met because of the Kree, love," Talos said, "We led two squadrons, trying to protect our people. Two squadrons became one but neither of us ceded control, and we butted heads but found those heads irresistible in more ways than one."

"Sounds sweet when you describe it."

"Well, we don't all have an Agent Nick Fury," Talos said with a smirk.

"Oh god, did he tell you what we were talking about?"

"No, he doesn't kiss and tell, love. But it's nice to see you relaxing a bit, eh? I hope you get closure from all of this, and i hope that maybe you and Maria can find a way to make things work, because I'd forgotten what a lovely Terran she is. I missed Monica too."

"I missed them both a lot," Carol said, smiling at the two of them, snuggled up in their own cot. In the cot farthest away from the others, Fury and Goose both slept, cuddling with one another as well.

"Agent Nick Fury wouldn't let anyone but us know he cuddles with flerkens in his sleep," Carol said, which made it Talos' turn to burst into hysterical laughter, slapping the dashboard with his hands.

"I never knew anyone could like me like that," Carol confessed, "I'm still not sure if Maria is just tricking me. She's so...Maria."

"And you're what, a bowl of broiled meats? Come on now, love, don't sell yourself short."

"Don't you wonder why the hell Soren tolerates you?"

"Every day," Talos said with a smile, "every day I realize that despite all I've lost and all that I have suffered for, to find one other person out there, at least one, who seems to want you for yourself, that's a rare thing, love. I ain't never feel that before her."

"Hmm," Carol grunted in response, smiling despite herself at Maria.

"And to answer your other question, the unspoken one," Talos said, "you stay with the person till you can't tolerate them anymore, and then you let them leave. Give them the opportunity to leave you, let them play out as long as they need to. That's how you know if this is for real and meant to last. So maybe one day Maria gets bored of you or the spark goes away or whatever. You had that time with her. You're letting go of control."

"You're very philosophical when you want to be."

"I am indeed, love, it's what the Kree don't give us a chance to be. You're our favorite Kree and our favorite Terran, mind you."

"Thanks. You're top fifty Skrulls for me."

Talos laughed again, slapping her on the shoulder. "You're alright, Carol Danvers. Look, somehow you've got that woman's attention so you might as well enjoy it. Don't wonder if you're worthy, you are. Just make the universe a better place for Monica to live in, and maybe if you're feeling up to it, my daughter as well. For me. As a belated wedding present."

"I will most certainly try," Carol said, "though I'm still not sure how to do that."
"One day at a time, love," Talos said, turning on some classic Skrull tunes, which Carol admitted were quite catchy.

"One day at a time."

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Beverly was quaint.

It was Maria's word for it, and though Carol didn't know the meaning, she had to agree. There had only been one set of Terran clothing aboard the ship, which was the leather jacket and jeans and Nine Inch Nails t-shirt she'd last worn, so she'd thrown that on and practiced the new photon trick, dissembling her Kree suit into a large handbag that she now wore round her shoulder. The opposite part of the trick, getting it back on, would be tougher. But Monica had looked impressed as the suit came off of her, bit by bit, and that she'd been smart enough to wear her pajamas underneath it.

So now this strange procession walked through Beverly, now that Maria had gone ahead and figured out from a neighbor that the Danvers were not at home, that they were at the local courthouse, for Joseph had gotten in trouble with the law again, fighting while drunk.

Said neighbor hadn't understood why three women, two men, a teenager and a small child wanted to see the Danvers so badly, but that family was always up to some nonsense and always waking up neighbors with their screaming and fighting. Two of their children dying within such a short time seemed to have snapped something in them. Their youngest daughter died first, her name was Carol and she was apparently a pilot of some sort and got in a plane crash. As for Steven, the oldest, he'd gone off to fight in the Gulf War (wherever that was supposed to be, Carol didn't want to ask) and gotten killed first day of active combat. Sniper took him out within seconds of him trying to abandon his convoy, trying to be by himself and be the big old hero.

Talos looked like Keller again, but Soren decided to disguise herself as his wife using a picture Talos had stolen, and the Daughter cheekily decided to disguise herself as a small blonde girl that Carol had found out before getting to the courthouse was a younger version of her, from a photo that Monica had showed her while they were in Louisiana.

Talos had warned that she could only maintain her form for a few hours so this would need to be resolved somewhat quickly and that they were going to leave, but stay with the ship, if she stayed out too long.

Not many people were inside, though Carol did recognize the man at the stand as vaguely her father, much older, with a breathing tube attached beneath his nostrils. She recognized two others as her mother and older brother Junior, but it seemed as though everyone else was just local townspeople come to see the entertainment, for Joseph was acting quite belligerent.

They all got strange looks upon entering, even more so when Carol, having already sat for too long on the ship, compensated by placing her feet up on the bench in front of her to be in a more relaxing position, and stubbornly refused to put them down no matter how much Maria tried to whisper to her how rude that was to Terrans.

It got worse when Joseph suddenly spotted the belligerent blonde white woman putting her feet up on the bench in a courtroom of the United States of America, and then that this person was his dead daughter, and that was definitely Maria next to her, and who was the two children, the three other adults? The lawyer asked what had happened and he refused to answer, and was given a heavy fine in response to the previous night's fight that he had had in a local bar.
Marielle and Junior had spotted them by now, but they too said nothing, just giving her strange
glances of their own, until Junior approached the group as soon as it had all ended, Joseph ranting
about the Second Amendment and free speech and other phrases that made no sense to Carol.

"How is this possible?" was all Junior said after standing silently in front of her for a few seconds.

"I think," Carol said, "you're my brother."

"What do you mean, you think? You are. I mean, I am."

"It's a long story, Joseph Danvers Jr."

"Junior is fine, what happened to you?"

"Can't give you all the details," Carol said, "but you're taking all of us back to your home and then
we're having a long talk."

They did so, Marielle worrying about how improper it all might be, giving weird looks at Monica.
It wasn't until they'd all come back home that things immediately went wrong. This was when
Marielle finally realized someone else who looked like her daughter as a child was there and she'd
fainted straight away, forcing Carol to awkwardly explain to Junior that, yeah, this was an alien,
two others were aliens, it was a very long story.

Junior took it remarkably well. Even more so considering how Carol had shown him a very minor
photon effect on her hands to prove that she wasn't making anything up.

Joseph had taken to bed as soon as he got home, feeling very sick and barely acknowledging
anyone, Carol had to lift her own unconscious mother to her own bed.

So now it was only Junior sitting in the living room with them.

"I live in Maine now," he said, "so I came back to visit because I'll likely not see them or you again
for a while."

"Did we like each other as kids?"

"No," Junior said, "not particularly. You were a goddamn brat. I'm sure I was one to you. I didn't
like you much. I wasn't happy when they kicked you out though, I didn't hate you. I just didn't want
a kid sister tagging along with the fellas."

"OK," Carol said, not offended or pleased about this answer.

"You don't remember me?"

"I remember that we're related. That's about it."

"Wow," said Junior, "we would've gotten along so much better if we'd both had that happen to us."

"I'm sorry we didn't get along."

"It's fine. Neither of us reacted well to that. They always treated us better, but now Steve is dead
and you're not, but they're both falling to pieces so fast, it's been a lot that you've missed and that
you didn't even know you missed."
He gave Maria an awkward look and said "you uh, your memory gone too?"

"No," Maria said sweetly, "just hers."

"In that case," Junior said, "I'm sorry for hitting on you way back when."

"I didn't think about it till just now," Maria said.

"I'm married with a kid of my own," Junior said, "I'm just trying to be polite."

"Most polite thing would've been not to mention it."

"Wait, what are you talking about?" Carol asked.

"He asked me out when we were both young, and said nasty things about me when I said no," said Maria, "and that's all he did, otherwise I'd tell you to photon his balls off."

Monica let out a little giggle at this and Maria said, "I'll put something in the swear jar when we get back."

"Your daughter?" Junior asked, nodding at Monica.

"Yes," said Monica, "Monica Rambeau, pleased to make your acquaintance."

"And you and Carol are--"

"Yes we are," Maria said, gripping Carol's hand, and it took all of her willpower not to burst up out of her chair screaming in sweet victory that the attraction was somehow reciprocated after all, though both Fury and Talos noted the look in her eyes and smiled at each other.

"And this is--" Junior said, motioning at Fury.

"My name is None-Of-Your-Goddamn-Business," Fury said politely.

Junior balked and everyone sat awkwardly for a few minutes, by now Talos and Soren had dispersed with their disguises and Junior kept on giving weird looks at them.

"Don't you worry, mate," Talos said, "we have no quarrel with you lot. We've got much bigger fish to fry, and luckily your sister has made sure our people and yours are allied for a while."

"That's good news," Junior said, still uncomfortable.

"You know, I'm happy for you, Carol," he then said, "you two had always been attached at the hip since birth so it's nice to see some true love every once in a while."

"It is nice," Maria said, gripping Carol's hand still tighter, and Carol decided that despite the circumstances this was the best day of her entire life and after the hell the last several years had been, it was long overdue to experience this.

"I mean it," said Junior. "Mom and Dad treated you like dirt."

"Thank you," Carol said, not knowing what else to say. "I just wanted to see what you were like. All of you."

"You'll learn nothing from Mom," said Junior, "and probably not from Dad either. I had to take a very long look at our lives and how they made them so toxic and I'm slowly rebuilding from square
one. All my preconceived notions were wrong. I did lots of things I regret and now I want the rest of my life to be a net positive for everyone else."

"I can relate to that," said Carol, meaning it.

"I know it doesn't make amends, and I didn't know this morning that I'd be seeing the sister I spent years grieving over, and yes, I did cry over you when I thought you died. It's still so much to take in. We hadn't said a word since you were kicked out and the only reason I had avoided you was because I thought you hated me."

Something clicked but no rush of memories this time, a something else, and Carol said, very sadly, "I thought you hated me."

"I know. I spent so long thinking only about myself. I should've said differently. Your life could've been so much better if I'd been in your corner but I was too comfortable being one of the two favorites and too grateful they didn't take it out on us. I did a lot of stupid shit to compensate for that. I drank too much, I'm currently separated from my wife, we have a kid that I hope you can meet--"

"You're not forgiven," said Maria with particular venom in your voice.

"I know," said Junior sadly, "this isn't about forgiveness. But I want to at least extend the opportunity, to both of you and to your daughter, who really seems like a chip off the old block."

"I love her dearly, but I'm not like her biological mother--"

"You don't have to be," Monica said, giving Carol a little hug around the middle.

"What I'm saying," Junior said, struggling with the words, "is that the three of you are always welcome in Maine, if you ever want to rebuild that connection with one member of your family. Maybe my wife will let you see our daughter. I can't imagine she'd say no to that, I always spoke very highly of you. And just because her husband was a shit doesn't mean that his sister was too."

"I'll think about it," Carol finally said after a few seconds.

"That's more than I deserve," Junior said, smiling at her. "Way more than I deserve. My actions will prove my intentions more than my words ever will, Carol. Or they won't and you kick me out of your life like I deserve."

He looked like he was about to say something else but was interrupted by the loud sound of choking breath and wheezing from another room none of them could see, causing them all to jump a little. Junior smiled sadly and said "that's dad. You ought to go in there and see him, while you have a chance."

Carol hesitated, and Junior said "I don't mean to pressure you, but he's not as well as he likes people to think. You don't need to forgive him or reconcile with him, but I'd recommend you see him. For closure's sake. Only for yourself."

Carol stood, and Monica stood with her. Maria tried to get her to sit back down, but Carol said "no, it's fine."

And then: "Do you want to come with?"

"Only good thing that man ever did was help create you," Maria said with bitterness in her voice, "and you and Steven were alright," she said begrudgingly to Junior, the glare softening a little bit.
Junior smiled sadly back.

"Where's my mother?" Carol asked.

"She's asleep too. She's prone to fainting spells. She'll last a while longer."

Carol shrugged, took Monica's hand, and the two very slowly made their way towards the source of the wheezing and the choked breath, while the rest all stared at each other silently. They heard Talos in the back say something along the lines of offering to cook for everyone, Junior offering him full access to the kitchen, and the two of them heading off to discuss recipes they were both fond of.

Junior was her biological brother, this Carol could recognize, but the memories associated with him or this other vaguely abstract concept of a brother called Steven still didn't quite click. She could recognize the relation she had to these people but not the sort of rush of emotion that came with thinking of Maria or Monica or Fury or Talos or Soren or the Daughter. The six people she loved most in the world. She even felt a sense of fondness for her single meeting with Frigga that didn't occur with the people related to her by flesh and blood, the two people who had spawned her least of all. Did Carol Danvers before Yon-Rogg feel this way too?

She and Monica, in her distraction, had entered the room, and Joseph Danvers was hooked up to plastics tubes and machines that were difficult for Carol to identify. He was awake, not very much, but enough to notice her, eyes looking a little angry, as she and Monica went up to him and stood there silently, regarding him with no emotion at all.

"Carol." Joseph finally croaked out after a few seconds.

"Joseph Danvers," Carol said flatly, with no inflection at all.

"You're dead," Joseph said.

"Mostly dead," Carol said in response.

"Who's that?" Joseph said, motioning at Monica.

"Her daughter," Monica said flatly in response.

"Hmmph," Joseph said, trying to shrug and wincing in pain at the sudden movement.

They stood silently again. Carol wasn't really sure what could be accomplished here. Time was being wasted that could be spent more productively helping literally anyone else more deserving. Joseph Danvers had been abusive, so she had heard, but she did not remember much that was abusive apart from what Maria had hinted at. She suspected that Old Carol had hated him way more than she did, all she saw now was an old withering shell of a Terran.

"You mend your ways?" Joseph asked.

"Mend what ways?" Carol asked.

"Living in sin. You stop doing that?"

"This 'sin' thing is very new to me. Apparently anything that benefits me is 'sin.' I suppose inside is the old Carol trying to hope that somewhere inside of you is the person she needed. Right now, I feel like I'm only doing the old Carol a favor."
"I don't understand."

"You don't have to," Carol said, "It's a very good thing that I don't remember you particularly well. I've spent the whole time thinking that maybe losing the old Carol was a curse, that I'd never get her back, but now I'm here thinking perhaps I don't want her back."

"You're the same Carol."

"I am and I'm not," Carol allowed, "Life is such a strange thing, isn't it? It would be so much stranger for Carol before the crash, because Carol afterwards only has a vague recollection of you. I don't think she liked you very much."

"I was doing what was best for you, as your father. I wasn't going to let you damn yourself."

"You're boring." Carol said.

This stirred Joseph a little. "What did you say to me, young lady?"

"I said you're boring. I get the vague recollection that who I was before was very scared of you, but now talking to you, I was expecting some kind of demonic presence, but you're so boring. So underwhelming to me. You're just like so many other Terrans I met. How could you be so anti-climatic after all of this?"

"You will not disrespect your father like this," Joseph tried to say, but was taken up by a fit of coughing.

"This would've worked on a child, Joseph. I'm not a child. I've seen so much scarier than you out there. Is that all Terrans are about, scaring their children because they can't scare anything else? That's not always the case, of course, because I'm lucky to know some of them who would never dream of doing such a thing. All these Terrans keep trying to scare me, I really wish I could figure out why."

"I always said to spare the rod was to spoil the child, and I was right."

"Yes, I did read some of that on the way over. I was asked what your primary text was and Maria handed me the one her parents tried to get her to read a lot, and there were some meaningful stories in it, but a lot of it was inconsistent and it feels like a lot of different people randomly took over when someone else stopped. Difficult to understand, your Terran text."

"Maria's still around?"

"Yes, she is. She's doing alright, as well as anyone in her circumstances can be."

"And that's--" He motioned to Monica.

"Yes." Monica said.

"Your mother has made so many mistakes," Joseph said sadly to her.

"Yeah," Monica said, "she has. She pisses me off a lot."

"Monica!" Carol said, slapping her lightly on the shoulder.

"She does! But she tries her best."

"I always was hard on your mom's friend, my daughter, because she always ran at sin like a
magnet. No matter what I did, kept on running towards it. Had to resort to stricter methods to put her on the way of light. Tell me, have you preserved your purity?"

"Joseph," Carol said, "I may not have been here in a while, but I'm not stupid. You won't be talking like that to her again."

"I need to make sure she hasn't turned out like you--"

But then he stopped speaking, because the yellow photon energy began to emanate from Carol's hand and pushed against his throat, causing him to gag and cough and let out a raspy cough.

"Joseph," Carol said patiently, "you may say any nasty thing you like about me. You'll be leaving Monica out of it."

"How are you doing that?" Joseph choked.

"Kree lightspeed engine malfunction. I was kidnapped by aliens, you see. They programmed me to become one of them, gave me their abilities, and I broke free. Rather like how I broke free of you, if my personal history is to be believed."

"He probably thinks that's a Satanic thing," Monica said, not moving to stop her.

"What's Satan?"

"You don't know what Satan is?" Joseph rasped, completely incredulous.

"No."

"Satan is the bad guy of the Bible," Monica said.

"He's more than that," Joseph said.

"Was he the snake?"

"I think so? He was the guy who showed up and tried to convince Jesus to turn his back on humanity too. He did a bunch of stuff."

"I didn't know that snake had a name. Makes more sense. And Jesus is--"

Monica said "Jewish carpenter prophet" as Joseph said "the son of god."

"Hmm," said Carol, "I rather liked him. Healed lepers and talked to sex workers and wanted to give to the poor, sounds like an all around decent enough person. Wonder if the Kree did something to him, but I don't know their history either."

"He was born of immaculate conception," Joseph said, eager to turn the conversation somewhere where he felt in control.

"Yes, I read that too," Carol said, "I've heard of some Celestials creating children in that way. Perhaps the god of the Terrans is himself a Celestial of some sort? Would explain a lot."

"What's a Celestial?" Monica asked.

"Immensely powerful beings," Carol said, "I've never met one, but the Kree talked of them all the time. Comparable to gods in some cases, I believe some of those Nordic myths I told you about are kind of like them. But they apparently have an insatiable desire to reproduce with other species and
when I read that story, sounded like a Celestial to me. Can't be proven, of course. Interesting theory."

"You can't be serious," Joseph hissed.

"What's going on?" The woman Carol recognized as Marielle, her mother, had unsteadily entered the room while she and Monica had been discussing this particular Terran myth. Her eyes did not leave the photon energy coming out of Carol's hands.

"I think," Carol said politely, "you're my mother."

"What happened to you? What are you doing to him?"

"Kidnapped by aliens, given this by them. As for this," she nodded her head at the photon energy, "helping him out."

Joseph began to visibly relax suddenly, beginning to glow with the yellow energy, looking around in confusion.

"You don't deserve it," Carol said, "and your illness is too far along. But I can at least minimize the impact it takes as you slowly succumb to it, I would actually do more if I could. For the sake of my biological sibling."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a tumor inside him," Carol said, "the moment I connected with him, I felt it. Grown too much to be completely stopped, it's all over him now. Failing fast. Beyond my scope. I can heal people, but not to that extent. So I'm minimizing the pain by giving him a fraction of a fraction of what I've got. It'll still hurt, but it shouldn't be so unbearable, and you can all make your goodbyes. Won't happen tomorrow. But it will be sooner rather than later."

"I'm dying?" Joseph asked, sounding like a child.

"Yes," Carol said, "but like I said, you've got some time left. I'd recommend using it. I've tried to brace the impact as best I can, because no matter what you did to Carol Danvers and others, no one ought to go in that much pain."

"I don't want to die," Joseph croaked out.

"I don't either," Carol said, "but it's inevitable. Death is inevitable. There's nothing after this. Nothing but the opposite of existence. I've been there very briefly, but it's not as bad as the theological punishments your myths talk about would have you believe."

"I'm not going to Hell?"

"That's what you called it. No, you're not. Nobody goes there. You sort of turn off like a light switch and then there's nothing after that. We are all going to go through that. Nobody is immortal."

Marielle, still at the doorway, began to suddenly cry, causing Junior to run to her and embrace her.

"Better to hear it from me," Carol said, "Less painful that way. You are my biological family, you did create me, and I figure I owe you that much, for creating me and allowing me to exist. The records I read suggested you didn't mean for me to exist, but that's OK."
The two of them kept on crying, which made Carol feel like wanting to cry too, because her words were causing them pain and as much as a tiny angry part of herself resented them, she wasn't trying to hurt anyone. She just didn't want to lie.

"You're not going anywhere tomorrow," she said to Joseph, "so make the most of what's left. That's all you can do now."

She looked at Monica. "Do Terrans not like discussing their myths? I suppose they have that in common with the Kree."

"I dunno, I never went to church or anything like that. Went to my friend's synagogue once."

"Hmm," Carol said, "Well, I feel bad now. I want to go somewhere nice and I want to sit and stare out at the plants and trees and so on, because I haven't had a chance to do that. We ought to do that. Make some use of this visit."

"OK," Monica said, still holding her hand.

"I'm not a very good Terran, am I?" Carol said sadly, giving her hand a squeeze.

"No," Monica said with a smile, "but I don't care."

Carol looked at her parents and her brother, all of whom quietly sobbing now. "This isn't how I pictured our reunion."

Junior looked at her, the most composed of the three, and said, "You're still welcome to visit in Maine if the wife allows it."

Carol smiled at him and said, "Give me an address and I might take you up on that. I have a feeling our biological parents won't want to see me again and I don't particularly want to see them either."

"You should've stayed away," Marielle said, "if you hadn't actually died, you should've stayed away."

"I agree," Carol said, "aside from my sibling, this was a huge waste of time. But at least my father won't hurt so badly. Trust me, if I hadn't shown up, this wouldn't have been nearly as good for him."

She looked sadly at her two parents one last time. Not because she was going to miss them, but because they just seemed so miserable to her, but not the kind of miserable her found family, as Soren had described it, would get. Their misery, over things she knew and some things she didn't know, was the kind that didn't explode outwards at her. Theirs was the misery that wouldn't go away even if she hugged them, but at least they let her and didn't lash out. This was the 'lash out' kind of misery. Not a good kind. Junior didn't seem to do this as much, so there might be hope for him.

She wasn't sure if she'd see Junior again, though she wasn't against it. He let go of his mother and grabbed a pencil and notecard and began writing down on it. Marielle tried to stop him but he quietly and firmly resisted.

"Don't you dare, don't you dare reward her for how ungrateful she's been."

"Sorry, mom," Junior said, "but I need closure too."

He handed her the card, with Terran words on them that she presumed was where he lived. She'd
ask Maria about that later, but she folded it up and tucked it away into her handbag, smiling at him. Carol presumed they hadn't liked each other as kids, but she'd hardly be about to destroy that relationship just yet. He seemed genuine enough.

"Goodbye, Junior," she said, giving him a hug. "I'll drop by if I have a chance." Junior said nothing, but did return the hug, tears pouring down his face now in record number.

"I missed you, Carol," he said, "I blamed myself. Thank God you turned out alright."

They let go, awkwardly but both feeling a little better. Marielle refused to acknowledge her, looking away.

"Uncle Junior, my grandparents are quite rude."

Marielle turned back to give Monica an angry look, but Junior only said "They've dealt with a lot."

Carol walked out of the room with a final wave at Junior and turning back, said to Joseph, "Make use of what you have left."

She and Monica walked back to the others and walked past them, and as one they all got up, said their quiet goodbyes to Junior (Fury let out a quiet chuckle at Marielle's glare) and they all left.

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Carol, without realizing it, was right. Both of her biological parents would be dead by the time she saw Junior again.

Chapter End Notes

This got to be far more emotional than I was originally intending, bits and pieces of my own life and the lives of friends went into it. There was a big point in the movie that she'd been estranged from her biological family for some reason and this is my speculation as to why.

Family doesn't have to be blood, in case you needed to hear that. Sending much love to all of you.

- G
Beverly, Massachusetts

Chapter Summary

Carol Danvers, briefly before leaving her hometown of Beverly, Massachusetts for the very last time, decides to spend a little time exploring the city with Maria and Monica, and makes a couple of interesting discoveries that will only be interesting to a Terran who has forgotten what it's like to be a Terran.

The eye of the storm is fast moving on.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The question now was what to do now. The options had severely limited themselves. For all of her ability, Carol felt this great deal of uncertainty. She wasn't sure what wrongs needed to be righted on this planet, let alone any planet.

Three potential options remained: Train Monica, visit Asgard, and (the most difficult) destroy the Supreme Intelligence.

The final one was not going to be even remotely easy. Likely not even something she could do alone. It had damn near killed her after their last encounter, and the rush of energy upon removing the Kree inhibitor chip had been temporary. She had gained a momentary advantage she didn't really have anymore. It likely wouldn't concern itself with her until she did, and it would continue using her reluctance as an excuse to keep chasing after Skrulls and Xandarians and anyone else it deemed as inferior to itself. The small fighting force it had sent after her had been its only error and it wouldn't make that mistake again. She also wasn't certain destroying it would do anything but make it a martyr to the rest of the Kree. How many of them would see as she did? How many of them would then turn to a more noble cause and start working for universal peace instead of their idea for it, which involved them in charge and everyone else obedient or dead?

Carol recognized a lot of similar behaviors between just the Terrans. She had impressed everyone else when the Daughter requested to go to a library and they both began reading with intense speed. Carol, according to Maria, had always been a fast reader, but now she was able to finish an entire book quite quickly and remember it quite well. She'd done this to learn about potentially dangerous Terrans, if not to her but for Maria and Monica. They had chosen to spend a couple more days in Beverly, as small and out of the way as it was, though Fury did end up leaving via the Skrull ship to go back to Bogota, not before making Carol promise to contact him sooner rather than later.

She was going to miss him, a lot. It had been an emotional journey for him, and it was evident he didn't want to go. Bogota, wherever that was, wasn't going to manage without its Deputy Chief. Goose went with him, so he could keep track of the Tesseract, though he talked of containing it in a more stable facility somewhere that he could keep better track of it.

But that left the others, the three Skrulls wandering off on their own, promising to return, which left Carol and Maria and Monica alone to wander around themselves. They spent quite a bit of time at the local library, Carol asking Maria for clarification on Terran historical events and Maria providing it. They made sure not to be too affectionate publicly, though they very badly wanted to.
None of them had gotten a chance to genuinely relax, and Carol knew she wasn't going to get a chance again in a long while if she was really going to do what she was going to do.

No way was Monica going with her, despite her protests. Carol was staying long enough to give her basic instruction so she didn't misuse it, but then she'd have to figure out the rest on her own. Maria had checked and the university was shutting down for a couple weeks in order to process before classes started up again, so that was all the time they'd have. Monica still insisted being an intergalactic traveler was far preferable to being a college student, but Maria wouldn't budge on this and Carol wasn't about to fight her on it either.

She'd grown bored of Terran history quickly and instinctively went for what the old Carol went for, the myths. She read the Nordic ones first so at least she could have talking points with the real ones, though she wasn't sure how much had actually happened. She turned to reading the small amount of comics, and turned to who was apparently her favorite as a kid, the one called Superman. Some of the old Captain America propaganda comics were there too. For some reason she thought of Peggy Carter and her husband Grant and how they were supposed to meet in a month. She figured it would be better to meet them right as Monica was going back to classes.

Fury had handed her another device called a cellphone and she called him with it, asking him to arrange the meeting with the two of them in two weeks as opposed to a month, and invited him along. Fury said he would see.

She felt sad. Fury was in Professional Mode again. Back in Bogota, he didn't sound very happy to be back. He had constraints and obligations Carol didn't. Everyone but her and seemingly the three Skrulls had obligations. They could leave because of her so easily, but they also seemed so dedicated helping their fellow Terrans. It was sad, but admirable.

Maria had brought money so they stayed in a small motel. As it was two beds in one room, it was silently and mutually decided that nothing more than snuggling was an option with Monica right there in the next bed. But that in itself was nice enough, even though they had gone through the motions of bringing a small cot for Carol to be laid on the floor, that was never used. Carol, in this form, had never stayed at a "motel" and found it to be charming. It was kind of run down and she saw the droppings of Terran animals Maria referred to as "rats" in some places, but it was still nice. Especially after the photon energy was used to excise all the bacteria and small insects from the room to truly clean the sheets and mattresses.

Monica, for her part, had really missed the two most important people in her life being this affectionate, even if Carol in this form seemed way more reserved than the Carol she remembered. You'd have to explain everything to this Carol, to relearn everything, and she jumped into this task with enthusiasm. They pulled out a deck of cards Monica had brought and taught her Go Fish and War again, which she'd been really good at pre-Kree. To see Auntie Carol genuinely laugh and smile again brought Monica more joy than anything. She'd missed her more than even Maria did. Her grades had suffered, she'd retreated into herself. At least she had known that Carol had never abandoned her intentionally. She was old enough to not really need to be told to do anything, so Carol didn't have the added pressure to feel like she had to be a surrogate mother. They acted far closer to close friends considering how close in age they had comparatively gotten to each other in all this time. Carol had barely aged a year in over a decade thanks to the forced lightspeed travel. She was still very much a woman in her mid-twenties. It was something to get used to.

Maria's next client wasn't going to show up for a couple days. Talos and Soren and the Daughter would appear in disguise each night to let them know they were still there, and they made plans to meet up at the ship to take Maria back. They had also decided they were going back to Tarnax after this, but would meet Carol and Monica wherever they decided to go once the two weeks were up,
to bring them to New York before finally heading back there for good, where they would tentatively try to begin developing their plan to annihilate the Supreme Intelligence once and for all.

They went to a couple restaurants so Carol could try Terran food, or at least more of it. She especially grew to like raw fish wrapped up in grains and kelp, though they all agreed that was their favorite. They had wandered into the nearby forest so Carol could take Maria on a proper flight, holding her up with her photon energy, Maria laughing hysterically as they flew through the air. Monica began to try to teach herself how to fly too so she could be a little prepared for training, though there was quite a few bruises received this way.

The major event before leaving, the day before, was Carol wandering off by herself to something called a "vending machine" where sweet carbonated liquids could be obtained by giving it paper currency, encountering a small child holding a device she vaguely recognized. She had once used this device, called a Game Boy, to assemble a communicator by which she communicated with Yon-Rogg when she had first discovered herself upon C-53. Upon closer inspection, the child actually seemed to be around the same age as Monica had been when she'd last seen her before that lightspeed business. But the communicator device was drawing more attention from her.

It was clearly being used for its own purposes now, lots of strange electronic sounds emitting from it.

Carol, never one to recognize Terran social etiquette, walked over to the young woman and stared at the screen. Two strange Terran animals seemed to be simulating a fight with one another.

"What's that?" Carol had asked.

"Pokemon," said the young woman.

"How do you play?"

And the young woman explained. Even handed Carol the device to try out one of the fights, tried to explain the way different elements interacted with one another and what was weak or strong against what. She got the hang of it, kind of, after a couple of these fights but had enough self-control to hand it back. She and the young woman spent quite a bit of time sitting against the vending machine talking about different ones and she resolved that for the lonely nights on her upcoming intergalactic trip, this would be a good combat exercise for her.

She asked the young woman her name, and she identified herself as Brianne. Interesting name. She identified her full name as Carol Danvers.

She bid Brianne adieu. She'd never see her again, of course, but she also realized that she could not simply use a lot of the paper currency that belonged to Maria to get her own copy of this combat exercise.

So she asked Maria how she could get her own and Maria had only laughed and explained that after she had "died," Carol Danvers had an account where money kept on being put in, not a whole lot, probably low five figures, that she had initially written would be entrusted to Monica, but it was hardly an amount that could pay for all of her education so it was just sitting there.

So with Maria's help, a local bank was able to recognize the account, as Pegasus had made it quite accessible as long as you didn't divulge its exact source, and withdrew enough of the currency to buy this combat exercise that Monica also apparently really liked.
Practically skipping on her feet, Carol and Maria went to a local shop that specialized in these combat exercises and bought themselves a device to contain it and the combat exercise itself. **POKEMON CRYSTAL** was what Maria read off the little cartridge. Carol hugged her tight in thanks and then resolved that she wouldn't start it until after she was off-planet, slipping it into her handbag with the Kree suit and the remainder of the paper currency that they didn't need to use, low three figures.

**Chapter End Notes**

Very brief little interlude today since I've got a lot of errands to run and a lot of things to finish up, so I figured that if Carol is gonna have a little fun, then she better have some exposure to one of my other favorite things!

We're just about the point where things are going to kick off again big time, so why not let them have some fun without any cares or worries for a little while?

Very hopeful that y'all will enjoy where this is going next, and as always, any comments, suggestions to improve, how the weather is where you are, anything really, let me know!

- G
Yon-Rogg's mentor had been called Zen-Pram, truly one of the most feared warriors in all the Kree, and the death of his protege has cast shame on him. His honor will not be taken from him by some interloper, his might will never be denied by anyone. The only thing he knows how to do now is hurt and kill, and one way or another, the honor that he enjoyed previously will be restored to him, one way or another.

Zen-Pram was not the same sort of person Yon-Rogg had been. His protege had been known even before his death as someone prone to holding grudges and fits of anger, while Zen-Pram prided himself as a cold and calculating sort of Kree. He had actually found it quite amusing how much Yon-Rogg had aspired to emulate his example in training a protege of his own. That the protege of his protege, not even a proper Kree but certainly gifted with a bit of their influence, was his killer amused him even more.

Zen-Pram didn't have time to like or dislike anyone. He admired Yon-Rogg's tenacity and skill, always had, but the new wannabe Kree was far more concerning to his beloved Supreme Intelligence than Yon-Rogg's successor ever had been. Each Kree commander of a particular squadron (Zen-Pram's wasn't named, Yon-Rogg had referred to his own as Starforce) always had one they favored above all others to lead a squadron of their own one day. Zen-Pram, privately, felt that Yon-Rogg choosing the person he secretly wished to be assigned to mate with was a huge mistake. He had observed this Vers in a couple of her sparring rounds, and saw that she was quite a talent herself, but the emotional connection would be Yon-Rogg's undoing and he had turned out to be correct.

He stood now inside the Intelligence itself. He had long known he was among the most admired of its soldiers, willing to die a bloody death if Kree dominance could be assured that way. He was much older than Yon-Rogg, in fact one of the very first assimilated into the Supreme Intelligence's new and improved idea of what Kree was supposed to be. He had been there long enough to understand the small white lies that led to greater obedience, the necessity of those lies.

Zen-Pram had not operated as a soldier in many years. He had instead became one of the liaisons to other worlds, trying to maintain a semblance of diplomacy while more and more concessions would be made. While the war of occupation against the Skrulls had been led by Yon-Rogg, there was no need for diplomacy with them. They were uncompromising and would rather die and so Yon-Rogg existed to fulfill that wish for them. To resist the Supreme Intelligence was to declare yourself as undeserving of existence.

With Xandar, where he had been assigned, there was a different game to be played. Theirs was not two solar systems of Skrullos and Tarnax, difficult to navigate but ultimately more or less contained. The Xandarians were colonizers themselves, albeit far less willing to admit it to themselves than the Kree were. The trick was discovering which territories they were willing to concede in their societal desperation to appear like they didn't want mass conquest for themselves.
Zen-Pram didn't just pride himself on being a skilled combatant but also a skilled negotiator.

That being said, Yon-Rogg's death had affected him. He didn't weep over it, but he certainly didn't feel good about it. The Supreme Intelligence itself did not worry over this development as much as he did. He wanted to learn more about this new kind of threat, analyze it, study it, find a way to defeat it in its own terms. Xandar had become quite a dull battlefield for Zen-Pram. Allow the more openly fanatical Ronan to take over operations, let him wage his wars. Negotiations had slowly stalled, the Xandarians weren't as willing as before to concede territory. In Zen-Pram's mind, he'd only been trying to discover exactly how much they could be pushed until they declared all out war, and it seemed as though that point was fast approaching. The Skrulls resettling Tarnax with not a single life lost had definitely emboldened them a little bit. The fact that now Skrulls tentatively were considering pacts of solidarity with both the Xandarians and the Asgardians was a little concerning even to Zen-Pram. They were very few in number, only a few thousand versus the billions that the Kree had at their disposal, who they had forcibly or convinced into assimilation. That few thousand was defended by an asteroid belt and astronomical oddities so vast and chaotic that it wasn't feasible. Army after army was simulated going into the region.

Now, being Kree, they had never considered that the way that both the Skrulls and Vers had been able to get inside the system in the first place was arriving so few in number that they had much better odds of surviving the asteroid belts. It helped that the Skrulls knew exclusively how to navigate it and had taught Vers how to as well.

All out war with Xandar was inevitable, and it would be so boring. This would be a long and drawn out conflict, and they would win, but it would take a very long time, a couple decades of raising soldiers to kill themselves in the pursuit of reducing numbers far faster than the Xandarians could reproduce without the Supreme Intelligence's methods. This would be a war of attrition, and Zen-Pram hated those against hopeless Intelligence's methods.

Ronan and his underling, Korath, would enjoy that. None of them knew that future events would cause this to rage on for a good decade and a half before resolving itself when Ronan would get himself killed by another Terran.

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But here and now, Zen-Pram resolved to study this new enemy. They already knew how the Terrans had been able to get one of their own to absorb the essence of the Tesseract, and now two of them had been able to do it, albeit entirely by accident. Terrans had been largely ignored as they were a very primitive bunch, and even their own media seemed to acknowledge this. But they were very genetically malleable out of the groups of sentients spawned by the Xorrians, the species whose example the Supreme Intelligence had latched onto in order to replicate. Zen-Pram had considered himself the known galaxy's pre-eminent scholar on the Xorrians, his other major use to the Supreme Intelligence. They hailed from the planet Xorria, though what they looked like was unknown. The planet itself was barren and empty and the only one in its solar system, its star now a burned out white dwarf. The only other planet that seemed to have been colonized by these Xorrians was one quite a ways off called Morag, one that even the Supreme Intelligence seemed a little nervous about trying to conquer considering its distance from the rest of civilization. It was said that great artifacts could be found there, and Zen-Pram had always planned to visit.

The Xorrians had been highly advanced, even more so than the Supreme Intelligence itself, the only group of beings anyone could dare say was more advanced. The Supreme Intelligence had a room to itself that only a few could enter, Zen-Pram being one of them, that contained what little was still left from what had been found on various expeditions. The known galaxy's only remaining stock of what was called Xorrian Elixir could be found here, which had the ability to heal anyone
from any condition so long as they hadn't died, though this store of several thousand vials had never been used before. They could do a lot more besides, there were holographic images in this room depicting their rulers, these Cosmic Entities, as the Supreme Intelligence referred to them.

But it was known about them that they had more than likely used C-53 as a breeding ground for their genetic developments, possibly even imbibing the early Terrans with their own essence. They hadn't advanced nearly as quickly as the other civilizations, but you could see the similarities between them and many other beings. Their importance was their genetic malleability and how they were a prototype for what Zen-Pram considered to be higher forms of life, with the Xorrians themselves as the most powerful and the Kree striving to reach that level of excellence once again, one day.

They were an odd bunch from what little Zen-Pram had learned about them. There was a period where the Asgardians traveled there periodically because they had a tendency to worship anything more powerful than themselves as gods. They seemed to quite like that, Odin was a narcissist and the ability to head down there for universal worship, he and his fool sons, who had lived much longer already than Zen-Pram had lived but matured at a fraction of the rate that proper Kree did. The Supreme Intelligence had largely ignored them because they were quite strong, diluted forms of Celestials as far as Zen-Pram could figure.

Studying the Xorrians, you began to realize the connection between the creation of the universe and how one form of life tended to spawn from another. Much like they would grow to spawn Kree and Terrans and Asgardians and Skrulls and Xandarians and Centaurians and so many others down the line, they themselves seemed to be the product of Celestials, higher forms creating lesser forms to control, lesser forms aspiring to become higher forms. The Supreme Intelligence itself wasn't exactly sure whether it had been created by the original Kree (what that was exactly, no one was sure, just that something had been there before assimilation was necessary), or whether or not it was a last vestige of the Xorrians themselves, something Zen-Pram knew it was personally hoping was true.

The Tesseract itself was fascinating. Most beings seemed to have no interest in them, the Asgardians tended to try and hoard them for themselves and largely failed, but the idea of the Tesseract and other similar artifacts being able to create the higher form of life in one go that the Supreme Intelligence had been trying to breed for generations was a fascinating one. It contradicted a lot of what it seemed to currently believe. It didn't matter what your genetic structure was because the Tesseract, if utilized properly, would end up correcting the inevitable genetic mistakes that came with the existence of life.

There was, for certain, two artifacts on C-53 by now. One was the Tesseract, which they had no idea where it was located. The other was contained in a city referred to in Yon-Rogg's last notes as "Manhattan," by a being described only as "Ancient One" and that was one the Supreme Intelligence encouraged Zen-Pram not to mess with without an artifact of his own. Another was certainly on Morag, though everyone who had pursued it had died trying. The rest were presumably on Asgard and their lack of intelligence was made up with considerable brute strength. The best one to go for was the one this rogue Kree had accidentally gotten exposed to and was presumably keeping track of now. She would be the least amount of threat, and her protege had killed Yon-Rogg after the fool had helped create another elevated Terran lifeform.

This was all communicated between Zen-Pram and the Supreme Intelligence without words, such was their bond after the couple centuries of service he had provided for it. The Supreme Intelligence didn't seem to understand why exactly he wanted to try the fool's errand of pursuing these artifacts, which Zen-Pram wasn't entirely interested in doing. Trying to get all of them would be a fool's errand unless they were all in one place, and unless one could find a way to dilute their
raw abilities to the point where they could be contained. But they did want revenge, and they did want to make sure the Terrans didn't find a way into the stars. Yon-Rogg had reported that at least a few of the more elite Terrans were aware of them, and they had proceeded to hand their precious lightspeed capabilities to the Skrulls at that!

He would begin identifying who would be best for this mission, the best way to get a hold of at least one of the artifacts, and find a way to develop enough individual strength so that he could kill this Vers with his own bare hands. Then this process could be applied to every one of the Kree, and then the Xandarians and anyone else in their way could hardly compare to their military might.

Chapter End Notes

Zen-Pram was listed very briefly at one point in passing, but when it came time to figure out who ought to be next after Yon-Rogg to really escalate the stakes, he was perfect for the job. He, too, is a comic character, though I'm not sure how closely he sticks to the original since there's not much info on him out there. All that it listed was that he was Yon-Rogg's mentor, and so hopefully you'll like him.

Longer chapter, but I hope everyone is enjoying so far.

- G
"I just need you to be there."

Chapter Summary

Carol and Monica set to the important task of making sure to train themselves up a bit more before the inevitable conflict finds its way to them once again. There's a lot to do and not enough time, and the pressure will never stop building for them. All they all have now is each other.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Carol had been very thankful that Monica had greeted their brief return to Louisiana by rushing off into the bayou in order to begin practicing manifesting the energy on her own, telling Carol to wait a few hours before going after her so she could impress her with how much she had advanced in that time.

This had meant there was enough time for Maria to smile and press her mouth very pleasantly against Carol's mouth and tell her that more of the unbelievably enjoyable Terran customs were in store if she returned alone while Maria wasn't doing anything else.

The downside was that she now had to do her best not to reminisce on what had occurred last time this promise had been fulfilled, especially around that person's daughter, who she now had to train, who she had no idea how to train.

I mean, Monica was no fool, she had to know by now that Auntie Carol and her mother had resumed what they had apparently done very frequently before the crash, and New Carol could hardly judge Old Carol.

But this also meant she had to stay focused and not think about it, and she did a good enough job of it upon finding Monica floating in an awkward arc around a few trees, screaming in terror but refusing to put herself down.

How does one even train anyone? In all her time with Yon-Rogg she hadn't ever thought about it from that perspective, and also didn't want to have the same effect on Monica that Yon-Rogg had on her. Carol had only ever gotten anywhere in life in spite of others and not because of them. She was not arrogant enough or had enough self-esteem to assume Monica would succeed purely based on whatever she could possibly teach her, but at least she could be a net neutral, not a net negative on her life.

The way that Monica had always looked up to her, even at an early age (hey, wait, that might be coming back!), had been something that every version of Carol could be confused by. Even during her time as a test pilot for Pegasus (WAIT), she could remember coming home (WAIT A MINUTE) after a day where the plane had malfunctioned or Dr. Lawson would give her the patience and time that she didn't feel like she deserved (HOLD ON) and Monica would rush up to her with a big hug and tell her about how she'd bragged about her Auntie Carol for show-and-tell and--

Then she was on the ground, panting and feeling like her head was being torn into tiny molecules
because something definitively was coming back, and it was terrifying her, and she could barely hear Monica yell "Auntie Carol!" and land precariously from her own flight to place an arm around her, and for an angry second she felt her internal monologue scream (I DON'T DESERVE THAT) and felt like swatting her away for daring to do something nice for her, but the moment passed quickly. She slumped to the ground, still heaving for breath despite not exerting herself at all.

Monica sat cross-legged on the ground in front of her, not saying or doing anything, looking worried but just sitting. Carol weakly reached out with a hand and Monica took it, and both their hands started to glow as Carol began to sob, because suddenly something definitive, not just a flash, was coming back, a real definitive part of herself and seeing Monica in this way, so much like herself, had somehow caused a part of her brain that had stopped connecting to connect again.

She pulled herself up to her hands and knees, getting her breath steady again, the sobs only lasting for several seconds, before being able to choke out "I just saw something."

"What did you see?"

"You told the kids about me for show-and-tell, and I complained to your mom that you were giving me way too much credit---"

"You were always bad at accepting praise, Auntie Carol."

Carol laughed at this, despite herself. "I know."

She sat down, still feeling exhausted and said: "There's no Old or New Carol, it's the same person, but I've just changed so much but there aren't two different people, one just became the other. I want to do right by you."

"Just teach me the way you taught yourself. I don't need you to hold my hand. I just need you to be there."

"I can do that," Carol said, smiling a little more. "God, Monica, I always wanted you to look up to me and I never wanted to fail those insanely high standards you set---"

"Only one setting high standards here is you, Auntie Carol," Monica said quietly, "I just want an Auntie Carol."

"OK," Carol said, "Then I'm not setting any standards. First thing I had to learn was how to maintain this...what did you call it?"

"Photon energy," Monica said with a smile of her own.

"Yeah, that," Carol said, "I don't know why I never named it. Anyway, how to maintain the photon energy for a while. We're going to activate it around ourselves, I know you know how to do that, but I want to see how long it will last for you."

She brought back the experience of teaching herself when nobody else knew how to teach her. They maintained the aura around themselves, Monica for ten minutes bursts and Carol for a full hour. She was already developing so much faster than her several years younger than when she got it. She showed her how the photon blast could be in a precision strike, how the placement of your fingers determined the aim, how to use it to briefly defend yourself. She would shoot a blast at Monica, very light in comparison, but it would knock her off her feet to the ground.

This went well until they heard a howling noise, and the sounds of footsteps in their direction and they both instinctively flew up into the trees to avoid detection, seeing some of Maria's neighbors
follow a dog sniffing at the ground, talking about burglars of some sort.

Looking around, they could see just how close Maria did live to her neighbors even if she claimed to value privacy.

"This isn't going to work," Carol said sheepishly, then they both burst out laughing because two people imbibed with the power of the Tesseract were hiding from the neighbors in the trees.

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In civilian clothes, Monica led Carol into the local library, but this time Carol was determined to find a proper map of the continental United States, as Monica had referred to it, in order to find an isolated region where they could train. Carol had been able to cross this amount of space within a few hours, so it wasn't entirely infeasible, it just depended on how fast Monica could fly.

"We're like Peter Pan and the Lost Boys," Monica observed.

"Why?"

"They could fly and they never grew up."

"Huh," said Carol, and resolved to read that when she had a chance. She pulled out a notepad from her now trusty handbag and jotted that down on a note labeled "THINGS TO READ."

She sat down at a table, feeling thoroughly out of her element. She could fly between planets but not figure out this labyrinth of paper tomes containing the collective information of the Terran species, or at least a large portion of it. She wondered if Old Carol read books, presumably she must've read at least a few. Something must be improving because she was slowly regaining the ability to understand the written language she had once known, as if each word had individually been hidden from her and now they were all coming back.

That's how she knew "Peter Pan" and "THINGS TO READ." More words would arrive soon. No one, to her knowledge, had ever been successfully deprogrammed so she had no other experience to compare this to.

Monica returned carrying a pretty thick tome with her, opening it up to a map of the entire planet, all of the landmasses that made it up and all the artificial borders constructed by various Terran governments to declare what this or that entity owned for themselves.

Monica pointed to one on the left of the map. "That's America, that's where we are."

"Huh."

"Well, North America if you include Canada and Mexico," she added, pointing them out for convenience, letting Carol see the spelling of the words, the phonetic pronunciations making a little more sense now. "I mean, I dunno, do we have to stay in America?"

Carol thought about that. She hadn't actually visited many places in this continent but it seemed very dense and it seemed as people were very defensive of their territory. Definitely was a part of that whole obsession with control thing that she had noticed among Terrans and the way they liked to convince themselves they had control over some tiny portion of this cold and unfeeling universe.

She'd visited California, Louisiana, Massachusetts and Washington D.C. now, by her count, and she was supposed to go to New York for the very first time relatively soon, and she was told this was quite an important region of the planet to visit.
"I mean," Carol said, "if you can fly for long enough, we can essentially go wherever you want that doesn't have too many people around. Don't really want us to be spotted. But we could fly across the ocean to, um," and she pointed at the landmass right of North America.

"Africa," Monica read out to her. "I mean, we could? But I need to learn how to fly farther."

"That you do," Carol said, smiling, "that you do."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay, yesterday was particularly difficult for a whole host of personal reasons :/

Long story short, it was the birthday of a deceased family member I was very close to and I'm trying to find a more permanent position because I'm "underemployed" right now. But I had enough time today to be able to get some down so there might be shorter chapters for a little while.

Comments, suggestions, song lyrics, anything you feel like in the comments, please.

- G
Chapter Summary

Carol and Monica prepare for their very first flight together, but in typical Danvers/Rambeau fashion, don't properly prepare for it at all and just try to wing it instead (pun not intended). Naturally, things do not go quite as expected, and they end up on a little misadventure of their own.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

So they did practice, around Maria's bungalow while she worked on a client's plane, fixing an engine or a wing or some such, always looking back nervously to see how they were doing. This was second nature for Carol but Monica still had trouble with angling her body the way she wanted to fly. Carol would hold her hand and help steer her until she began to get the hang of it, until suddenly a few days had gone by and Monica was able to go for several hours without stopping for anything except water or bathroom breaks.

"You're a really good teacher," Maria said on the fourth night, Carol exhausted and leaning on her shoulder. She'd forgotten how much effort it was to maintain the photon energy for this long, it felt like running a marathon. She was going farther herself than she ever had before, and training with Monica was in turn making her stronger too. But this meant she was almost constantly fatigued, it was actually creating a physical strain on her muscles to power on for that long.

So the cure was shoulder rubs from Maria, which didn't entirely help but sure made her feel good. The other advantage of having two superpowered women in her life was that they could bring takeout back while it was still fresh and warm, so they all wolfed down fried rice that tasted as if it had just been cooked. Carol in particular discovered that shrimp fried rice was a favorite of hers, though Maria kept up talking of something called "metabolism" and how unhealthy it was to eat a lot of. Fair point, though after a few days, both Carol and Monica were actually getting leaner and more muscular than before. She had to speculate that she was burning a lot of calories using photon energy, and that it could physically exhaust them the way regular exercise could.

They also tested how fast Monica could fly, having her burst off from one end of the yard to the other. The first time, she hit Carol hard and the wind was knocked out of both of them, causing Maria to panic and run over from her work while they laid on top of each other, exhausted and laughing hysterically.

"Lieutenant Trouble, indeed," was all Maria said before scoffing and getting back to work.

Finally, six days in, they decided it was time to see if they could fly the ocean. They flew all the way to the most eastern point they could find, which was in fact the city of Savannah, Georgia, where they spent a couple hours wandering around the beach on Tybee Island because neither of them had actually been to a beach before. They also wanted to wait for a point where they could lift off completely uninterrupted, and that chance came a few hours later and one seafood dinner later.

"If you get too tired to continue, don't push yourself, I can carry you the rest of the way," Carol
warned, but Monica only responded by lifting off and blasting at full speed across the ocean, forcing Carol to follow.

Even if she couldn't convince Monica to pace herself, she could at least convince her to maintain a pretty consistent speed, but Monica kept going faster and faster and Carol had to keep pushing herself to be able to catch up. This wasn't as difficult for her, she'd made more than a few flights across entire solar systems by now, mostly on her own. But it was Monica and her enthusiasm that she worried about the most, made the flight more difficult than it should be. Carol had gotten good enough that she could try to calculate how fast they were now going, based on Terran measurements she'd looked up with Talos before, and she had to estimate that as they both whizzed as a yellow and blue line across the sky, they were going around four thousand miles an hour. Far faster than any of them had flown near Maria, only around a hundred or so. She had no idea Monica could already push herself this far.

The advantage of their masks was to keep the wind out of their eyes, and neither of them had bothered to calculate the distance of the ocean they were crossing, so they both were quite surprised an hour in to see a landmass approaching them.

They'd crossed the entire Atlantic Ocean in an hour by accident.

The other issue: Carol had spent so much time teaching Monica to fly, but never quite how to slow down. She spread her arms out and allowed the energy to dissipate but Monica didn't. So she had to kick off again, faster still, climbing up speed as Monica lost control far ahead of her, going hundreds of miles in a few minutes, screaming as she began to tumble at top speed downwards.

"I am not bringing you back as a corpse!" Carol yelled out into the air, knowing it was whistling too much for Monica to hear, and dipped down after her. Monica had figured out how to let the energy cease, but she was now clearly panicking too much to be able to resume flying at a much slower speed. Carol wanted so badly to mentally beat herself up for forgetting this part of the lesson, a lesson she'd only learned herself by fucking up much worse than this. She caught Monica in a downward spiral, but Monica's momentum was dragging her down too.

Trees, desert, land of all sorts, too fast to be able to tell, but they suddenly felt themselves passing through something that felt electrically charged, Carol instinctively putting the photon energy around them both like a shield, tearing a hold in this barrier neither of them had seen before going through it. She couldn't see anything but the ground approaching, so she pushed the last of it, leaving just enough so she wouldn't pass out from the effort, in front of them to brace the impact, holding down Monica's neck against her chest with her hands so she wouldn't shatter her neck upon impact.

They hit, hard, mounds of dirt and grass being torn up in their wake, both of them yelling out, Carol holding onto Monica like her life depended on it (and it did), screeching gradually to a halt, both their Kree suits covered in mud.

Monica rolled off, coughing and shivering from the intense cold of the massive wind chill she'd just gone through, Carol too tired to offer any photon energy to warm her up. She could begin to feel it building up against now that she wasn't using it. In the sky, a small hole floated in nothingness, where they had entered this barrier.

"How's that for a first flight?" Carol asked weakly, pulling herself up, breathing deep, visualizing the energy building herself up again as Monica pulled herself to her feet.

Carol's head was ringing. She suspected she had a concussion. She felt so absolutely woozy. Monica seemed alright, a little woozy herself but no major injuries minus some bruising from what
she could tell.

"Auntie Carol?" Monica asked. "Are you alright?"

Carol was about to answer but then suddenly coughed as something touched her lips, and realizing it was her own blood. A clump of hard rock must've hit her in the head during the impact, she felt a wound on her temple bleeding pretty steadily. Focusing the photon energy, she was able to heal the wound to where the blood only dripped rather than flowed.

For the first time, she observed her surroundings. There were small houses and what appeared to be farms. The residents did not seem especially alarmed by their appearance, which was more surprising than anything. Were they farmers?

That was the last thought she could ask herself before she was suddenly knocked off her feet by a hard impact to the back of her head, instinctively tumbling and rolling so she could turn and face whatever had hit her. She saw first Monica, jumping at her assailant with blue photon energy surrounding her, but being kicked away herself. Then the assailant: a humanoid, presumably a Terran, wearing some sort of armor that was entirely black, with silver engravings, face entirely covered by a mask.

"You are not welcome here," said her assailant before leaping at her again.

Carol smiled and let off a photon blast at full charge in the direction of her assailant, only for the smile to turn into a gasp and then a yell of pain as it hit the armor, and caused it to let off a purple blast of kinetic energy that threw her off her feet again.

In one fell swoop, she was on her back and the armored man was on top of her. Carol threw a punch at his head, which rebounded with the same purple energy, knocking it back to the dirt. She smiled again and drove her knee upwards into the man's crotch, causing him to rebound off of her, howling in pain.

"Can't do that twice in a row," she said flatly before aiming a kick at his head, having it be rebounded, and blasting a proton blast at his stomach, which hit him with concussive force and pushed him farther away, yelling out in pain again.

Carol noticed then that he wasn't targeting Monica at all, and that his gloves had claws on them, that he wasn't using.

The moment of hesitation was all he needed, and the armored man pounced off the ground, far faster than she was expecting, and pinned her on her back again, the claws coming out to her throat this time.

"You will never get the vibranium," the armored man said, flatly, a statement of fact.

"What's vibranium?" Carol asked.

Now it was the armored man's turn to hesitate. He raised the clawed hand up, but did not strike, the mask contorting to show an expression of confusion on his face. Carol, strangely, didn't feel like she was in danger from this person.

"Your pupils did not dilate."

"Yeah, so?"

"You do not know?"
"No?"

A moment, the armored man leaning up close to her face, staring deeply into her eyes, then pressing his head onto her chest ("hey, watch it!" she yelled at and pushed him off again, which worked), leading to him crouched in a pose on the ground, hand on his chin.

"I was trying to listen to your heartbeat," the armored man said, tone much calmer now as Carol pulled herself to her feet. She noticed some of the residents beginning to get closer and stare at her curiously.

"Why are you here?"

"By accident. We were flying, we messed up, we didn't know there was a barrier here."

"Flying? How does a person fly on their own?"

"That's a long story."

"Hmm," said the armored man. The mask suddenly curled in on itself and withdrew into components going around his shoulders, and the face of a very stoic and concerned older man with a trimmed beard and short hair faced her.

"My name is T'Chaka," said the armored man, "and we are going to discuss this. Outside the barrier."

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There was a small building several miles away that served as a hostel, but also a place where the apparent King of Wakanda, as this country was called ("I've never heard of it," Monica had said), would use in order to conduct business and negotiations outside the borders of his tiny country. The very few other Wakandans the two had encountered, flying alongside T'Chaka as he raced on all fours ("like a jaguar," Monica said), all seemed very unimpressed by them, which was a change of pace in how awestruck Americans seemed to get whenever Carol acted like herself around them. Two women flying through this supposedly secret barrier didn't seem to faze anyone one bit, they all went about their business peacefully. A few even gave them a pleasant wave.

So now they all sat at a table drinking a liquid that was bitter at first, but with Monica's help, some cubes and a white liquid was added to it and it tasted quite pleasant now, and it made her want to stay awake forever. T'Chaka had put on a shirt and pants with designs Carol didn't recognize over his armor, the feet now sporting a pair of brown sandals over them. It was quite a strange look, but he seemed to be comfortable and he was certainly one of the nicer Terrans Carol had encountered recently.

"How is this possible, you being kidnapped by this alien civilization? The Kree, you called them?"

"Yeah," Carol said, "very long story. I was once a pilot of some sort, and I helped my boss fly an experimental plane she was using to test a lightspeed engine. We were shot down by the Kree, as she had been one of them and betrayed them. The one who found her and killed her, called Yon-Rogg, kidnapped me, programmed me to join them, and I spent six years killing on their behalf until I found myself back here, and discovered that they were only interested in assimilating civilizations into their own."

"They sound like colonizers."

"Excuse me?"
"Colonizers. People who constantly try to take over this country. That is why I attacked you. I will not allow any intruders within our border. If they knew what we held, they would combine their efforts to take all that we have worked for."

"Which is?"

"Vibranium. I mentioned it to you already. You might know it better as the source of the shield possessed by the tool of American colonizers back during their World Wars called Captain America."

"That's what it was made of?"

"Indeed. It was the last time it was ever stolen from us, by one Howard Stark. He blackmailed us, promised not to reveal our secret to the world if he could keep what he had his cronies steal. He was an evil man, but he was killed many years ago. Of this, we are very glad."

"Like Tony Stark?" Maria asked.

"That blowhard, luckily, does not know of us, so clearly his father, Howard, never told him."

"Oh, that makes way more sense," Monica said.

"Wait, who are these people?"

"Rich Americans," T'Chaka said, "Anthony is the son of Howard, runs his company, a weapons dealer. Helps the American government with their proxy wars to steal petroleum from other nations. We have long suspected in another couple years, they will start a proxy war in the Middle East somewhere to take all of their oil for themselves. This Stark will help sell weapons to them, and he would help take us over if their government ever found out about us."

"Is SHIELD the American government?" Carol whispered to Monica.

"I don't think so," Monica whispered back, but T'Chaka pushed back from the table, claws out, looking suspicious again.

"SHIELD is the very worst of the American government," he said with anger in his voice, "They would stop at nothing to take all that we had if it would enrich their soldiers. What do you know of them?"

"Well," Carol said, "I have a friend who works for them."

"Who is this friend?"

"Nicholas Fury?"

"I do not recognize that name," T'Chaka said, visibly relaxing. "I was worried you had made friends with Alexander Pierce, the absolute worst of them all. That man is obsessed with America dominating the entire planet."

"I've met him," Carol said, "but I did not like him very much. He gives me weird looks."

"Just like a colonizer," T'Chaka said, smiling. "They wish to colonize others the way they colonize other nations. All they think of is possession and domination. Quite sickening to think about."

"I guess," Carol said, sipping at her coffee, lost in thought. "What do we do now? Promise not to tell anyone?"
"Would that really suffice?"

"I dunno," Carol said, "I don't have any reason to tell anyone. But you just met me, how could you take me at my word? But to be fair, I don't plan on being on planet for very long, so that's the incentive."

"You're leaving the planet?"

"Yes," said Carol, "there's a big threat out there I have to take care of."

"This Kree you speak of?"

"Yeah," Carol said, "Much bigger threat than any colonizer. Not to say that they don't sound dangerous, they do. And I'm not on very good terms with the American government, as you called it. Or with anyone in SHIELD besides Fury. You could try to look at my file with them if you wanted to verify that they view me as a threat."

"We already did," T'Chaka said, "as soon as you gave us your name. Their security was laughably amateur. And you are correct. they wish to find a way to replicate what had happened to you. That is the only reason we have not killed you where you stood, though I will admit that such an endeavor would be extremely difficult."

"Thanks," said Carol, "but I don't want to make any more enemies."

"Nor do we," said T'Chaka, "we only wish to remain in peace, alone from the rest of society. But we cannot take you at your word unless you really do leave the planet when you claim."

"You could look up Fury too, if you wanted."

"We already are," said T'Chaka with a smile. "We are nothing if not thorough around here."

"You have a lot of cool shit," Carol said with a smile, that caused Monica to gasp and T'Chaka to chuckle.

"Indeed we do," he said, smiling for the first time.

"Not to mention," Carol said, "if you ever had any issues with people trying to take your vibranium, you could always ask me to help you out, you can never have too many allies in the fight against colonizers like the Kree or the ones you deal with."

"I would not use that word so much," T'Chaka said, "it is, how do I say, kind of our thing to say."

"Got it," Carol said, smiling again.

They sat in silence for a few seconds until Monica said, "so what? Are we in trouble? Do we fight to the death? Can we just go?"

T'Chaka laughed and said, "You cannot fight me to the right for the kingdom unless you are of royal blood."

"Worth a shot," Monica said, causing T'Chaka to laugh harder.

"How about we make this a deal?" T'Chaka said a few seconds later, "You help us restore the damage to the barrier that you created, you create a way for us to stay in touch, and later on, we hammer out a way that perhaps we can help one another out. You clearly do not represent any government. I would offer the same to your ward, but she seems too young for such things."
"I'm not young, I'm seventeen." Monica said defiantly.

"Indeed," said T'Chaka, "I became king very close to your age. But that seems more than reasonable. It will be much faster work with your help, and would be a good show of apology to us."

Carol shrugged and said, "How do I do that?"

"We have the tools, they're easy enough to learn. Restore it from the outside and give me a way to contact you personally, and we will be, at least for now, even. We will, of course, know if you have tried to betray us in any way, and we will kill everyone connected to you if that means maintaining our security."

"So no telling Maria," Monica said.

"Who is Maria?"

"My mother."

"What does your mother do?"

"She fixes planes."

T'Chaka laughed. "I forget America is a capitalist society where people have to work themselves to the bone for survival! Your mother, she is a working class woman, I presume?"

"I guess? I'm only able to go to college because of Fury helping me with that. He's really rich but doesn't want to be."

T'Chaka laughed even harder, giving Carol the familiar safe feeling she'd gotten from Frigga and Peggy Carter. "Wonderful! No working class woman is the enemy of Wakanda. You're more than welcome to tell her all about us."

"Aren't you a king?"

"Indeed," T'Chaka said, "but we are not about to let our citizens starve. We pride ourselves in ensuring all Wakandans have access to the resources they need. The United Nations tends to label us as 'third world,' their derogatory term for countries they deem unsuitable for very ridiculous reasons. We do not try to dissuade this belief in any way because it means we will never be targeted by most if they think we have no resources to speak of."

"So you're not a king, technically."

"Only in name, child. Only in name. Though I suppose we are not a democracy either as we decide our rulers by the old traditions."

"Huh," Monica said, but didn't ask any more questions.

"You are, of course, welcome to stay here as long as you like," T'Chaka said, "though you are unfortunately not welcome back in Wakanda at this time, though it is not personal. We do not allow any outsiders, even if they are as entertaining as yourselves. But this building and its amenities are at your disposal." He stood up, bowed, and shook both of their hands. "Till we meet again."

T'Chaka exited the building, flanked by Wakandan citizens working there, all talking casually, very different from the deferential ways that Americans treated their leaders. T'Chaka gave off the
impression that he was no better than anyone else, and Carol found that she preferred this method of leadership greatly.

"You did what now?"

Maria stood, hands on her hips, as Carol and Monica relayed the news of the day, trying and failing to keep it together in spite of all the tomfoolery they had gotten into. This was Maria trying as best she could to act like the strict disciplinarian her parents could be, and she could never quite manage it with her own child.

"We accidentally invaded a foreign country," Monica said proudly, licking ice cream around her words, giggling to herself.

"We didn't invade anything, we don't represent anyone," Carol said, but she too was discovering the magic of this Terran invention called ice cream and enjoying it quite immensely herself.

"How the hell did you do that?"

"We had trouble with the flight, and ran into turbulence--" and Monica burst into hysterical laughter, almost dropping the ice cream all over herself, as Carol couldn't help but let out a few chuckles herself at how everything had proceeded after that.

"I really should be mad at you," Maria said, but the demeanor was fading into a smile, because the Rambeaus had always had a sense of pursuing adrenaline rushes even when they shouldn't and Monica was living up to the family name in this moment.

"You should, but it was too funny," said Monica, "and we met the king."

"King? King of what?"

"Wakanda," Carol said.

"Wakanda? Seriously?"

"Seriously," said Carol, licking her own ice cream and smiling. "His name was T'Chaka."

"One moment," said Maria, and she sat down at the computer device at her desk and began to type. About a minute later, after the dial-up connection finally decided to work as designed (complete with loud whirring and beeping), she motioned for the two of them to join her at the computer where an official portrait of T'Chaka was displayed as a digital image.

"That's who you met?"

"The very same."

"Wow," said Maria, a little overwhelmed by all of the news, "and he just...let you go?"

"We had to repair the damage to his secret barrier thingie, and he said we could only tell you his secret about vibranium."

"Like the stuff that Captain America's shield was made of? I thought that was made up."

"No, it's real," Monica said, "I'm pretty sure he was wearing armor made out of it, and like, I think he has all these cool high tech things he's hiding from everyone else because he doesn't want it to
be stolen, and said that Howard Stark stole some a long time ago, and that's the father of that Tony Stark douchebag all the boys at school can't get enough of--"

"Tony Stark? 'The Steve Jobs of Arms Dealers?' Don't tell me you met him, too."

"No," Carol said, "he sounds like a huge asshole and his dad is apparently a thief. Hopefully Captain America didn't know that."

"He's on the tabloids all the time," said Maria, "tabloids are like papers about famous people and all the ridiculousness they get to engage in when they have a lot of money. That one is hopeless, it's what happens when you're born with a silver spoon in your mouth."

"Sounds like it," said Carol.

"How has my life gotten so strange since the 1990s?" Maria asked, mainly directed at herself. "How have I met Captain America's main squeeze, how did my daughter meet royalty, how did I go to space and kill aliens with my girlfriend--uh, I mean--" She looked with an alarmed expression at Carol but relaxed when she saw Carol blushing deeply in response.

"I've done a lot of weird shit," Maria finished.

"You need to put a dollar in the swear jar, and you've done some pretty cool shit," Monica said, walking over to a pair of jars in the corner of the room, labeled with each of their names. She put a dollar in the one that had way less money in it, as opposed to Maria's, that was stuffed to bursting with dollar bills. Carol chuckled at this.

"Thank you, baby," Maria said absentmindedly, sitting back, staring at the picture of Wakandan royalty.

"Next time you do some cool...stuff, you need to invite me," Maria said to Carol.

Chapter End Notes

We're a good fifteen or so years out from T'Challa taking the throne, so for now it's gonna have to be his dad who our intrepid heroes encounter. We're about to be moving very quickly and this wasn't on the outline, but I also found myself doing this without thinking and so I had to redirect a little.

Hope everyone's enjoying so far! Comments, suggestions, anything I can do to improve, please don't hesitate to let me know!

- G
When A Plan Comes Together

Chapter Summary

Back on Hala, the one known as Zen-Pram begins to plot a way to regain his lost honor from a woman he's never formally been introduced to. He has a team in mind, one almost to counter the one that Carol seemed to assemble by chance, and they've got their own particular scores to settle via the Kree honor system. Who will they be?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Carol confirmed with Fury that night when Peggy Carter and Grant Buchanan would be available to meet in New York, and whether or not he could be joining them. Maria wasn't going and Monica had to go back to school. It was going to be in a couple of days, and for the first time since Carol had arrived back on C-53, she was going to be completely alone. Maria had a remote assignment, Monica had lots of course work to make up (everyone did, really), and Carol was left to her own devices, but given free reign of the Rambeau household, with a promise that they'd all share at least one more dinner together before she left C-53 again. Carol had enjoyed her time there, especially with Maria, but it was time to get back to business. Her injuries from fighting Yon-Rogg had mostly recovered, she still practiced daily as best she could, she needed to be ready for whatever would come next.

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Zen-Pram began to make his selection for the squadron that would obtain one of the artifacts, then be used to destroy what he saw as the last true threat to Kree galactic dominance. This would not be necessarily a squadron that he led personally, but rather an informal group all pursuing the same goal, with an unorthodox hierarchy.

His first choice was named Una, not only because she was an all-around skilled combatant, but because of the added factor that before the traitor known as Mar-Vell began assisting the Skrulls, she was in a forbidden affair with her. This information could be used against both Una, who wanted to make up for this perceived slight any way she could, and Vers, as he had learned that Mar-Vell had served as an informal mentor to her before her assimilation by the Supreme Intelligence. She had been imprisoned in stasis ever since the affair had been discovered (that had been, as he discovered, why Mar-Vell had initially traveled in exile to C-53), but she was fully capable and ready to prove herself, most of all to destroy the one she saw as Mar-Vell's successor.

While he had been Yon-Rogg's mentor, and Yon-Rogg had been Vers' mentor, his own mentor was one named Devros, a truly feared specimen who had been put into voluntary stasis, having grown bored of combat, finding it repetitive. He had requested before being put into the stasis to only be awoken when a worthy foe was in his way, and Zen-Pram felt as though his old mentor would respond to this opportunity for the fight to end all fights. His calculated risk paid off after showing Devros the footage of the sparring rounds between Yon-Rogg and Vers, the footage of her destroying Ronan's fleet, documenting how she had been able to briefly free herself from the influence of the Supreme Intelligence and kill Minn-Erva, Att-Lass and the rest of Starforce sans Korath.
The third was the mentor of Mar-Vell herself, a proud Kree bio-engineer known as En-Vad. This was a very different sort than Devros, who lusted after the ultimate form of combat above all else. En-Vad was a scientific sort above all else, which is how Mar-Vell had gained her love of research and study (Zen-Pram found scientific pursuits to be a huge waste of time). But En-Vad was also a tactical genius, able to read enemies' movements in advance, loved probability and odds and it also helped that he could hold his own quite well in battle when such a thing might be necessary. En-Vad didn't like to fight, but proudly served the Supreme Intelligence, and was eager for a chance to test out some new theories should this Terran called Vers be captured. To study the effects of Kree blood on Terran physiology had never been done, and for all intents and purposes she'd been the first Terran captured, at least as far as the official public record went. If there had been others that had been captured and experimented on, that was knowledge reserved only to the Supreme Intelligence.

The fourth was an interesting one, but Zen-Pram always knew that the Supreme Intelligence must be watching C-53, it had agents on every planet, looking for every opportunity to strike. C-53, before Mar-Vell, had been deemed as such a low threat that only one had been left there, taking on the guise of a Terran teenage girl called Leigh Marshall. This individual had had so little to do over the past few hundred years, being stationed during what was called the 18th century to Terrans, that she'd wandered from place to place so her lack of aging and strange blueish complexion could never be discovered. The Supreme Intelligence's major blunder, Zen-Pram thought privately when not connected to it, was not contacting Leigh Marshall the second Mar-Vell was outed as a traitor. The whole mess would've been over far faster and he may still have his protege alive and well to fight alongside him. Out of all of them, Leigh was not one that he had ever met before, so establishing contact with her after centuries of neglect was going to be a tough goal. Out of all of them, she would be the one that would be hardest to convince. But she knew Terrans intimately, knew how to manipulate them, and that was invaluable.

The fifth was one known only as Kleaner, and this one was nothing more than a brainless brute, one of the Supreme Intelligence's early attempts at cloning Kree instead of assimilating other species into their numbers. She was vicious, with faster strength and speed than any of the others and bonelike claws growing out of her hands. She would be tough to control, but with a neural link provided by the Supreme Intelligence, Zen-Pram was confident that she'd serve as a last resort, just in case things went out of hand.

The sixth was called Roco-Bai, listed under the designation of Shatterax, a Kree covered in an almost impenetrable armor that could be manipulated, blades and spikes that could be used as weapons. He was a particularly bloodthirsty one, eager for any opportunity to maim and kill, useless for fights against lots of enemies because he was not much of a combatant in those cases, but against a single foe, he reigned supreme. He occasionally took part in the battle-slave holo-matches for fun, but was best known for having his ass thoroughly handed to him by Yondu Udonta in the final round, and the added humiliation of having his life spared. He was disliked for being too brutal to be even a proper heel in those games, so he'd be far better served wreaking havoc on C-53.

The seventh and eighth came in pairs and were the other ones who Zen-Pram didn't already know to some degree, but they were the only remaining recruits that Yon-Rogg had personally trained, and this was a mission purely for revenge. Their names were Tir-Zar and Zyro, and they were both extremely green, their training not even completed when Yon-Rogg was forced to return back to the Supreme Intelligence, empty-handed and in disgrace. They were young and eager, and that hungry energy might motivate the rest of their team. They spent their days sparring with one another, waiting for a chance such as this.

This did not go entirely well. The first surprise was that Leigh Marshall said yes, but with
conditions, and that Zen-Pram would have to visit her personally down on C-53 or somewhere with neutral ground. The second was when Una abruptly refused the request, and shut off communications entirely. Perhaps Zen-Pram had underestimated her somewhat, she seemed entirely unwilling to engage in military combat anymore. She had been willing to listen to the request, but then politely said that she had moved on from that life, was now engaged in biology and genetics development, and had no interest in any more combat. Zen-Pram, privately, mocked her as a weakling, unwilling to serve the greater good. Zen-Pram had made the smart choice of not telling Una who the other members of his squad were going to be, though he didn't anticipate Una checking who he was most associated with, and finding a connection with Devros and En-Vad as her former lover had been openly mentioned, a chance for revenge against the traitor.

Una had genuinely loved Mar-Vell, though it had seemed that the feelings were not returned that strongly. Even so, Mar-Vell hadn't been rude about the affair, and went into exile to spare her honor in the Kree hierarchy when they had been found out. She had been shamed for it, subjected to months in stasis, alone with her own thoughts, and went through it quietly and without complaint. But Mar-Vell had taken the brunt of the punishment, and so she was let back out to researching more efficient assimilation methods, ways to make the assimilated even stronger, and never "acted out" again.

The second mistake Zen-Pram made in his arrogance was not checking up on Una again after she refused the request. Nobody did, she was a nothing and a nobody, someone who had betrayed the Kree code for her own devices, as the story went. Nobody checked as she visited the room that had once belonged to Mar-Vell's supposed successor, and then Yon-Rogg's, and realized that she could no longer sit idly by while she knew life, even life belonging to a species she didn't belong to, was in danger. Mar-Vell had always wanted this, but in the months in stasis, she had radicalized herself and deprogrammed herself, waiting for the perfect moment. It was now or never.

So nobody noticed when a small Kree shuttle, ostensibly for delivering supplies to the Kree-Xandarian war front, left orbit and went in the wrong direction, lightyears away, so occupied they were with their plans. Straight to C-53.

Chapter End Notes

Every one of these characters has previously appeared in the comics in some form and fashion, and all of them have a connection to either Carol or Mar-Vell, so they weren't just picked out of a hat! They're also characters I highly doubt Boden/Fleck will choose from for the next movie so we're still (hopefully) not violating canon!

Comments, suggestions, anything at all, right down there! No hesitation!

- G
Chapter Summary

The coalition assembled by the crafty and cunning Zen-Pram gains another member, while some decisions of future consequence begin to fall into place. Whether it be the vicious Roco-Bai, the former battle-slave, or the former mentor of Mar-Vell, each and every one of these Kree have a particular debt that needs to be paid back and they’re all going to get a chance to pay it back.

Chapter Notes

But the part of Zen-Pram's plan that worked perfectly was the part involving possessing the power of another one of the artifacts. This would serve as an effective counter to the powers of the Tesseract, now contained in C-53 itself for several decades. The Supreme Intelligence had always wondered where these had gone, possibly for future use.

The Tesseract and the one possessed by the Ancient One were out of the question. Fighting this Vers without any added protection would probably work, but Zen-Pram did not want a "probably," he wanted a complete and guaranteed success. Nobody had any earthly idea where the one called the Soul Stone was, the Power Stone was contained in the old Xorrian planet Morag, so that was out as that was far too deadly for any living being. The one called the Mind Stone was also not accounted for, and it seemed as though they may have to risk attacking C-53 without any benefits until a sudden breakthrough from En-Vad saved the day.

En-Vad was the only one of them who was invested in sneaking onto other worlds outside of Kree jurisdiction and try to sniff out information, potentially new scientific discoveries to try and create them before any other civilization did. Zen-Pram, in the early days of this plan formulating, kept trying to get Mar-Vell's former mentor to stop, but he simply shrugged and ignored his advice.

But for once, the damned fool's dangerous habits had picked up on something, something that emerged during a visit to Xandar of all places, and thanks to a handy little elixir he had developed that could neutralize the effects of narcotics on the Kree physiology. Asgardians, as everyone knew, were heavy drinkers, and it took a lot to get them inebriated, but they could be quite suggestible once you threw enough at them. En-Vad had taken up a conversation with one on furlough from their latest war against the Frost Giants or whichever band of misfits they were trying to assimilate these days. As En-Vad was completely blue, it was theorized that he must've been assimilated from the Centauri system, and so he had learned enough about them to pretend to be from there whenever he wandered off wherever he went, less any enemy civilization found out a Kree operative was sniffing about.

Anyway, he had encountered an Asgardian soldier all by his lonesome, in the pursuit of beings of any species with compatible reproductive organs to engage in those dastardly rituals with. Zen-Pram, in all his objective and chemically fueled abstinence, could never understand their eagerness to shove parts of their bodies either into or have them shoved inside themselves repeatedly until bodily fluids were spurted between them. Nasty stuff, but En-Vad always kept track of the buildings where such services could be paid for in case a juicy bit of info came his way. This
served well for the Asgardian, who had, get this, really gotten the idea in his head that he wanted En-Vad to watch him take one of the paid distributors of reproductive services! En-Vad, never having a chance to observe Asgardian biology in its fullest, shrugged and agreed, and so after all that was finished was when the Asgardian suddenly began talking about literally anything En-Vad might want to hear about, unaware of En-Vad's other elixir, used to make people highly susceptible to suggestion.

Asgardians called their planets "realms," mainly because they didn't take the conventional shape of planets and were strangely linked by some archaic transportation of some kind. But one of them was the one this poor fellow was tasked with guarding, with the highly repellant sounding name of Svartalfheim, and inside of it was something that sounded very strange, that this sap had only briefly glimpsed!

That strange something was something that command forbade him to tell anyone about seeing, as he was prone to sneaking inside the realm, which by now seemed to be entirely cloaked in darkness and shadows of some sort, all trying to hide this strange glowing substance in the very middle of this void that had very strange effects. This soldier had seen another trying to touch it and then have his organs and skin forcibly switch themselves, so he heard!

A brief consultation of the various holo-docs that Zen-Pram kept in his database, and it was confirmed: this had to be the one referred to only as "Aether," this could be the breakthrough they were looking for! The hurdle now was to figure out how this Reality Stone's power could be manipulated for their own ends. They knew outright taking it wouldn't work, they'd have the entire Asgardian army, led by that blonde nimrod with the giant phallic symbol as a weapon, on their tail, and they wouldn't last long against them.

Instead, they'd have to sneak in long enough to expose each of them to it in a way that would replicate what had accidentally given Vers her unique abilities, and sneak out again before anyone was none the wiser. That would be the hurdles in this part of the plan, and imagine what they could do if they could somehow duplicate a part of its essence like Mar-Vell had done with the Tesseract! Imagine how many Kree soldiers they could put anywhere they want. The Xandarians wouldn't stand a chance, their treaties of neutrality would be dust in the wind and the Kree would have the greatest victory they'd had in years. The Supreme Intelligence would be pleased!

In Yon-Rogg's still active database was his footage of Vers (then called Carol Danvers, according to the log) being exposed to Mar-Vell's lightspeed engine trying to sabotage it. This was sent to En-Vad, while Zen-Pram told the others to be patient, that once En-Vad was able to figure this out, they would be subject to power greater than they could ever imagine. Roco-Bai was the only one who had to be convinced, for he wanted it right this very moment, but Zen-Pram advised patience, that good things come to those who wait, and that he could slice and dice so much more vividly with this. Take part in some battle-slave matches in the meantime!

En-Vad came back after the first day of analyzing the footage to conclude that it would be impossible without something resembling it to test with, something that could be simulated, and nothing could compare to that. Zen-Pram consulted the Supreme Intelligence, who just smiled (in the form of Devros, for him), and relayed to En-Vad all of the data and research that had gone into giving Yon-Rogg comparable abilities, even if those had been very unstable. En-Vad could begin now, but he wanted to consult a friend of his for help, with the Supreme Intelligence's permission. This friend was the leader of a think tank calling itself the Kree Science Council, constantly studying for any new improvements to Kree domination, and this friend's name, the closest thing En-Vad had to a friend, was called Phae-Dor.

Phae-Dor, a much more quiet sort than the chatterbox that was En-Vad, put their heads together
and locked themselves inside the Kree Science Council's chambers for quite some time with the data provided. Zen-Pram didn't want to get the entire civilization involved in this, it was meant to be a mainly covert operation. Of course, the benefits would be shared with all as Kree law decreed if it worked out, but he hardly wanted to pull a Yon-Rogg and come back empty-handed, be punished the way he was punished. He advised secrecy in all of their matters, promising the Science Council first dibs if this endeavor bore any fruit in the end. Phae-Dor, encouraged by the Supreme Intelligence itself, was forced to agree, but silently plotted to find a loophole to do it anyway without any punishment.

Some time was spent determining how far away this Svartalfheim (it was given other names, such as Harudheen by its occupants, referred to in the texts he found only as "Dark Elves," which sounded a bit...undescriptive). The name they settled on was the interpretation of Harudheen in their native tongue, "Harud" meaning "world" and "heen" meaning "dark" (their language seemed to have some similarities to their own, as it turned out). So they called it Dark World for simplicity's sake. The other issue that emerged was that while Asgardians were among the greatest combatants in civilization, longer life spans than most and more brute physical strength, they were a profoundly uneducated people, even the royal family didn't seem to have much knowledge beyond basic survival functions. For the lower class citizens in their roughly hued caste system, Zen-Pram could forgive this ignorance, as he understood enough to know it was intentional to force them into servitude. The royal family being arguably dumber still (with the exception of their queen Frigga, who he had heard was privately mocked a lot for spending a lot of time outside Asgard and studying) was less forgivable. One in a leadership position over the masses should know more than anyone else! He had heard rumors one of the two princes, the one called Loki, was relatively well-read for an Asgardian, but even he seemed to struggle without a universal translator attached at all times.

Zen-Pram scoffed at scientific pursuits, but he still was just wise enough to understand the necessity of such types when it came to conquest, especially one of a personal sort like this. The Terrans themselves posed almost no threat whatsoever, though they did have nuclear capabilities and if poorly planned, could pose a huge issue. They possessed warships that fired out tiny masses of metal, primitive but deadly weapons, but Zen-Pram hardly thought they could mobilize in time. They were all too disconnected, too many factions fighting amongst themselves for comical reasons. Zen-Pram and Carol, for all they would soon get in conflict about, at least agreed that Terran governments and militaries were highly inefficient against anything other than each other.

Point being, the problem that emerged was that Asgardian texts were highly inaccurate and their historians and scholars were prone to brag more than objectively discuss facts, and this meant that things took a bit longer than expected. They couldn't rely on source material to guide them, they'd have to scout out the place themselves. This accidentally worked itself out somewhat because they discovered that one of the Asgardian's most daunting boasts was in fact not true: all of the texts had claimed that the "Nine Realms" they spoke of were several entire galaxies connected by a "World Tree" that roughly translated from "Yggdrasil", such vague terminology that then had to be interpreted into data that could be usable. This ended up not being the case, when an initial scouting run containing Zen-Pram, En-Vad and Phae-Dor (now an unofficial member) investigated, they discovered that in fact, all nine of these realms were simply a solar system of a very unconventional makeup, possibly altered by some sort of ancient technology that the Asgardians clearly didn't understand the origins of but at least knew how to use.

They knew that the Asgardians' single advantage, past the long lifespans and brute strength, was their access to something referred to as a "Rainbow Bridge," that allowed instantaneous transportation anywhere that an Asgardian had already been. They had some sort of biological connection to this device, tailored to their genetic makeup exclusively (so no Skrull could fake it out, as far as they knew), which let them transport immense distances in mere seconds. They had
no idea where it came from, or who had truly created it. They also knew that the royal family only allowed one person of their choice to have access to this, but it was mainly for their benefit and for whichever allies they chose to bring along. Lower class Asgardian citizens were not allowed to use it unless decreed by the royal family.

Zen-Pram would've loved to have it for the Kree, but he knew that it would ironically be easier to get access to the Reality Stone as they were not watching over it quite as closely.

But the fact that all "Nine Realms" were in one system was a great relief, as it would make the travel time much easier, and they could simply appear out of a jump right next to "Dark World" and not have to worry about sneaking past any of the other planets. The "World Tree" itself wasn't an option because it was watched most closely of all, and allowed beings from each planet to travel to the others. Because of the Asgardians' old hobby of routinely appearing on C-53 several centuries earlier to be worshipped as deities, they also had a strange connection to that planet, allowing them greater access to that one in particular. But heading to C-53 without warning too early might alert Vers, or even worse, the various factions of the planet with their weapons. They did not want to make the mistake Ronan made and fly in, guns blazing. This was to be a stealthy approach.

So it was decided: they would head to "Dark World" directly via scout ship. The question of how to filter it was discovered easily: simply convert the Kree suit the Supreme Intelligence made for Yon-Rogg. It had been able to contain it, even if Yon-Rogg hadn't known how to properly utilize it at all. A separate, more intense filter was created for the left hand of the new outfit, which each member of this fighting force was to wear, a single indentation allowing for the essence to be absorbed without overloading the system.

Zen-Pram was very thankful that the Supreme Intelligence was so willing to divert resources and manpower for this, though he knew why. Vers had directly threatened the Supreme Intelligence itself when she sent Yon-Rogg back to them on a damaged Kree pod, knowing his recording would capture those words. All other enemies of the Kree, the Skrulls and Xandarians and whoever else, all swore they would kill the abstract entity of assimilated species called Kree, rather than the source of that assimilation. Vers, and by extension, her home planet of C-53, had directly threatened the leader. The Supreme Intelligence by its design would favor as a threat anything that threatened itself directly over an abstract like the billions of lives it was willing to lose in order to protect itself and keep itself functional. This was the true beauty of assimilation, Zen-Pram noted to himself in his private writings, ever so slightly changed so the holo-doc would not connect to the Supreme Intelligence's digital cloud of information. It truly leveled the playing field and with the right understanding of the field, one's personal objectives could be achieved at the expense of all others.

Zen-Pram did not merely want to succeed, he wanted all else to fail as well. His success, in his mind, was contingent on the failure of everyone else around him as well. The last on that list to fail would be the Supreme Intelligence itself, and Yon-Rogg's own success before taking on a student had been a reflection of himself. By humiliating Yon-Rogg, Vers had humiliated Zen-Pram. By exiling herself from the Kree over a biologically reproductive affair, Mar-Vell had humiliated En-Vad. By humiliating Zen-Pram, Devros was humiliated as well.

They all had their honor in the Kree code to be restored. It was fortunate that this loss of honor was only symbolic and that they were not treated any differently in society. It was a failure by association rather than a failure by action. If Devros and En-Vad had been better teachers, than Zen-Pram would not have taught a student who lost a fight in such a way and Mar-Vell would not have betrayed the Kree in favor of the Skrulls. Yon-Rogg, in killing Mar-Vell, had actually restored En-Vad some honor, but not all of it.
It was a system this Vers had clearly never bothered to properly learn. She had a reputation for not doing particularly well in Kree re-education courses. She was immensely strong and a fantastic combatant, but not interested in the honor of being a Kree, the reason why assimilation was the greatest gift that could be given to you, how ungrateful she was to ultimately reject such a gift. It would have been more acceptable had she simply been unintelligent, but it was far worse than that: she had proven clearly capable in learning Kree tactics and battle strategies, excelled in the particular subjects she enjoyed, like the history of the Kree Empire. She simply chose not to apply herself in areas she disliked. The more he studied her record, the more Zen-Pram grew to dislike her, but the more he did understand why Yon-Rogg had been so keen to train her, beyond the unfortunate biological attraction that had ruined him. Someone uniquely gifted with the essence of an Infinity Stone was certainly a great increase in honor, someone who excelled in combat and strategy, one who was unpredictable and dangerous. A raw talent, able to be molded however you liked. Someone who, at first, had been clearly eager for instruction and guidance, even if she seemed naive enough to not recognize his true intentions. That was the part of Yon-Rogg's failure that Zen-Pram highly doubted he could regain honor for, the fact that it had all been motivated by a desire to mate. To betray oneself for one's biological weaknesses was heresy. The irony is that for all that Vers had done to betray the Kree, she had more than fulfilled her duty in that capacity of her service. If she had violated that mandate, she had done so in such a way that no one could catch her.

It needs to be noted that this viewpoint towards sexuality was not quite the same as what Nicholas J. Fury experienced. This was repression rather than apathy, guided by chemical injections and hypnotic feedback. Nicholas J. Fury had been born without that sort of desire, and Nicholas J. Fury always respected everyone else. It was what made him happy, one of the few things that did, being around people he could admit this to and not be shamed about it for. His few friends, Carol and Maria and Talos and Soren, would never dream of doing such a thing. This was different. This was repression. It was this repression that led to so much trouble.

It must be noted so the Nicholas J. Furys of the universe, wherever they may be, feel validated and the Zen-Prams feel shame.

Chapter End Notes

We're moving away from Zen-Pram's cohort pretty soon after this, but we've got to set up all the chess pieces before the match starts, if you get my drift. I've gotten ideas for a couple more MCU fics and even something OC but I also want to make sure this gets the proper finish. Probably my favorite MCU film now.

Comments, suggestions, horoscopes (I need one!), anything at all down there!

- G
Meet Leigh Marshall

Chapter Summary

While Zen-Pram and his team sneak into Svartalfheim to obtain the item needed to execute their particular plan, the single Kree operative still remaining on C-53 begins to make moves of her own. Her name is Leigh Marshall, she's been there for centuries already, and she's been waiting for just as long for an opportunity to prove herself!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

What Zen-Pram hadn't told the others as they entered Svartalfheim was that he wasn't just planning on absorbing the essence of the Reality Stone, he was planning to take it for himself. The civilization of "Dark Elves" that had once used it lay dormant, and it was estimated that they may have tied their very life essence to the existence of the "Aether" itself. Taking it would thereby prevent them from awakening and possibly taking revenge. Not to mention the whole realm was covered in dark matter, obscuring the view, making it impossible for Asgardians by themselves to be inside. No lifeform should actually survive without assistance, and a little dark matter was a strange superstition to the Asgardians but not to the Kree.

The suit the Supreme Intelligence had designed for Yon-Rogg, designated as a Magnitron (the oaf literally described it as his moniker of choice upon fighting Vers again, the footage of which was being shown on the holo-net to much laughter and jeers), had been redesigned and improved on with the help of En-Vad and Phae-Dor. it was no longer quite as bulky, around the same size as the Kree suit that Kree elite soldiers would wear. Each of them received one, save for Leigh Marshall (still on C-53, still waiting for them to meet her personally) and Kleaner (too vicious and feral, no one felt like there was any point). Zen-Pram's, however, had one extra addition, something En-Vad and Phae-Dor personally helped him with. He wanted a receptacle for the Aether itself, something that would contain the entire thing without overloading the suit or frying him to a crisp. He'd heard what had happened if people touched Infinity Stones without protection. En-Vad wanted to research the results on someone other than himself and Phae-Dor only wanted partial credit for the invention.

It made sense for Zen-Pram to risk his life in this way, and it was a bronze exoskeleton attachment to his Magnitron, that culminated in a bronze colored gauntlet with a space on the top of the left hand to contain the Aether in, connected to a filter that would phase out and expose the user to its essence at a rate that would allow for optimal results. They didn't bother telling any of the others aside from Devros, who scoffed at the idea of having a clear advantage like that. He would kill this Kree traitor with his bare hands, only with the added enhancement everyone else was being offered. That being said, he thanked Zen-Pram profusely for the honor of being given the option, knowing that the others would likely lose some but he would retain his own. To disrespect your mentor would be a loss of honor, and Zen-Pram quite liked Devros anyway, so it was only fair. When he assumed power, he was going to let Devros have whatever he wanted, namely the greatest opportunities for combat he had ever seen and his choice of living places.

Tir-Zar and Zyro, the last of Yon-Rogg's personal recruits, were none the wiser, though they were excited to just received their basic Magnitrons, already placing them at the level of elites. Roco-Bai
wasn't either, and had actually refused the Magnitron unless it could be integrated into his particular suit of armor plates and spikes. Zen-Pram suspected that sadistic lunatic would be the first to go, but perhaps that would give Vers false hope that she could take on the others. When offered first dibs at attacking Vers, Roco-Bai was only too eager to agree, not realizing he was being given up as a sacrificial pawn.

Zen-Pram made them all understand implicitly that though the chance for combat would greatly increase later on, they were to kill none of the Asgardian guards unless they absolutely had to. The last thing any of them needed was to alert them, and they may be dumb but they were an immensely strong people.

"Like hell they are," Roco-Bai said, immediately getting everyone concerned. "Let me at 'em, I'll show you how wrong you are."

"Patience," Zen-Pram said in response, sharing a concerned look with Devros. He too was itching for a fight, but at least his former commander and now colleague understood that right now, caution was of the upmost importance. Devros did not itch for any fight, but rather one that would equal his immense ability. Asgardian guards would be a fun diversion, but even he was realistic enough to understand that if Odin's son Thor entered the fray, he would not last long, not without help.

"Orders go as follows," Zen-Pram said, not tolerating any more dissension. "Devros, En-Vad, Phae-Dor, with me. Roco-Bai and Kleaner, you're going to take the middle and cover our tracks. Tir-Zar and Zyro, you're taking perimeter around the ship as we return. It'll be up to you to make sure we're not spotted." Zyro had been designated as the pilot as he had been the one with the most amount of experience, and he looked extremely pleased to be given more responsibility than he had been expecting.

"Don't we have one more somewhere?" Tir-Zar, the more hesitant of the two, asked nervously.

"On C-53 itself, indeed we do," Zen-Pram said. "That'll be our next stop. We're having a separate briefing on the planet. They may be a planet of primitives but they shouldn't be underestimated, they've got ways of killing that are quite brutal."

"No killing?" Roco-Bai asked sadly.

"Not for now," Zen-Pram said firmly. "After we get a hold of this, all the killing you want on our next stop. Terrans are much squishier than Asgardians and tend to neglect a lot of their own. Easy pickings. Our operative planetside can help with that. You give us a few days and you'll have all the killing you ever asked for."

"Don't know if I can wait a few more days," Roco-Bai said but Zen-Pram moved on to the two newest recruits. "Tir-Zar, Zyro. Your commander shamed you, took your honor as he took mine. This is your opportunity to regain it for yourselves. I've heard nothing but good things from your instructors. Do not disappoint me. Do not disappoint us."

"Yes sir!" They both yelled in unison and slammed their hands on their chests in the traditional Kree sign of deference. Zen-Pram gave them both as warm of a smile as he could manage. He remembered fondly his own shy youth before being molded completely into the killing machine he was now. They were still quite squishy, but he suspected they wouldn't be for long, not with the incentive he was offering them at stake.

"Devros," he said to his old master next, "my mentor. My commander. My compatriot. My friend. It's an honor to be working alongside you again, and I'm grateful you've provided me this
opportunity."

"We'll have quite a bit of fun soon," Devros said, smiling pleasantly. "I'm there all the way."

"En-Vad, Phae-Dor, it's time to prove yourselves. With me."

Zen-Pram leaped off the side of the ship into the growing darkness, forcing both scientists and Devros to curse and leap after him. The glowing array on their Magnitrons would provide the way, and the dark matter itself would provide cover for any patrolling Asgardian guards.

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Though one member of this informal force, which really ought to be named according to that one member, had not quite accepted the offer given to her by one Zen-Pram, the Kree once known as Le-Ay and now known on C-53 for the past few centuries as Leigh Marshall, perpetual teenager, decided to begin investigating the mark, her very first mark in all her time here!

Leigh Marshall had arrived vaguely in 1710-1715, she thought, though she'd admittedly never really kept track of any of that because it bored the stuffing off of her. She knew she'd been one of the ones modified by the Supreme Intelligence during a time that it had been concerned with genetic manipulation more than purely assimilating what was already there. Leigh Marshall, despite the age and temperament, was very old for a Kree, older than even Devros. All she had known of C-53 is that it contained an artifact of great power that would be quite useful to the empire somewhere and it was her job to find it.

She had never found it. Once arriving on Earth, as she knew it was called to them in at least one of their languages, Leigh Marshall had never left the continent she landed on. You'd think someone as old as her would get to witness a lot of historical events of the planet, but she honestly couldn't care less about who was fighting or fucking who. Leigh liked to wander more than anything else, and train herself, and she did compile a great deal of info that she could remember in an instant with her insanely eidetic memory. That info was the wildlife and floral and fauna of the North American continent, she'd literally wandered all over it. Along with the supposed immortality and photographic memory, she had very limited shapeshifting functions of her own, something she suspected was something the Supreme Intelligence may have taken from a Skrull. She could not change her height or weight, but she could slowly adapt so that she could resemble any type of Terran that she encountered and was able to touch for long enough. It also helped that she could make herself look a bit older as well, as she had no interest in reproducing with Terran younglings. She wasn't sick like that. But she almost never adapted to someone's form in that way, though she did have a few flings with some of the locals every now and again when she got bored. Mainly she'd compile a list of facial features and differences in people so she could hide in plain sight. Maybe she'd be hired to be a babysitter, which she genuinely liked doing, and hold babies and children enough that she could "record" those features for use whenever she needed to hide.

America was a strange place. It seemed to have a bizarre repulsion and obsession with fornication, for one thing. As time went on, they developed the tendency to develop very elaborate conspiracies in order to pretend that they had control over things. She'd learn which groups of them would be targeted so she could keep track of that too, stoke those tensions to protect herself when need be. She compiled info in her head like an encyclopedia. She was the last living being to see certain species before they went extinct, for example. The Terrans killed them off with impunity, wasted every possible resource they could waste, and in the grand scheme of things, the planet probably wouldn't last another fifty years without either a massive war or climate change taking them all out. There were some who could potentially develop clean energy sources but those people were too concerned with their dragon hoards of wealth to be of any use.
So suddenly, at the end of the Terran year 2001, she was abruptly contacted by a Kree again for the first time since she arrived and she'd almost forgotten she was Kree, almost, if not for her strange abilities that no Terran could naturally reproduce. She hadn't felt particularly betrayed, but she was annoyed that the Supreme Intelligence hadn't talked to her again, even when the artifact she was supposed to be looking for was made even more secure after another Kree called Mar-Vell got a hold of it. She hadn't even known about her until Zen-Pram contacted her and told her everything. She could've done something about that, and Zen-Pram, to her surprise, agreed with her.

But now the assignment was simple: track down a target who had killed a Kree commander and had actually been the one to blow up that Kree fleet she'd spotted in the sky that one day in 1995, which she had thought for a moment was coming to pick her up in a very dramatic way and finally be celebrated for all her accomplishments. That wasn't the case, but a chance to kill a Kree traitor who had done that and had killed this Kree commander? Perfect chance to show she wasn't here for no reason. But she didn't want to look too interested, so she told Zen-Pram she'd think about it if he met her in person somewhere. Gave him the latitude and longitude of where she was going to be around, and began trekking, yet another road trip like she'd made so many times before, on a bike.

With Zen-Pram's info in hand, she could begin to figure out where this Vers, called Carol Danvers on Earth (the first human being to become a Kree! Took 'em long enough, she thought privately), could be located now. Using Yon-Rogg's footage and the footage Carol had recorded before modifying the suit so it could no longer be tracked, she kept private note of the individuals she had seen. Carol hadn't been high enough in rank to know about the way the Supreme Intelligence spied on every one of its soldiers at once.

Leigh wrote down the list of names she was able to identify, though she had to narrow it down to the ones who appeared more than once. So the names in order went: Nicholas Fury, Phillip Coulson, Maria Rambeau, Monica Rambeau. She wasn't counting Skrulls, who were just morons if they didn't want to be proper Kree like everyone else with a brain clearly did, she wasn't counting the various Terrans she rarely interacted with, nor was she counting any Terrans who Skrulls were imitating. Just four names of people she interacted with who were still living, as Dr. Wendy Lawson, AKA Mar-Vell, was now deceased, a proper death for a traitor.

Out of those four names, she only had an emotional connection with three of them. Those would be a good three to look into to see if there was a way to target one or all of them. Not to mention that this Nicholas Fury was apparently the one currently keeping the Tesseract in that nasty flerken she saw on the recordings, which would gain her even more favor with her Supreme Intelligence!

Two Infinity Stones in one go! Leigh Marshall of Hala did that!

She was able to figure out relatively quickly, pouring over what she could find in internet cafes, that this Maria Rambeau lived in Louisiana, and unlike other Kree, she was very good at using Terran technology. All it took was a bike ride all the way there, stopping to casually steal food and drink from any restaurants on the way, avoiding any creepy Terran assholes, to make it from Georgia, where she had currently been staying in the home of a reclusive business owner she'd actually killed years earlier (a rare Terran who had paid off his entire mortgage, no less!) and just outside of New Orleans. At different internet cafes along the trip, stopping off in Atlanta, then Auburn, so on and so forth, she began using her years of experience teaching herself how to operate Terran technology to make some last minute changes to her Earth identity of Leigh Marshall.

The name stayed the same, the same as it had been a couple centuries earlier. But Leigh Marshall, was, in all intents and purposes, an eighteen year old foster kid with nowhere else to go, but such good grades at those Terran schools! Sure, it may be the beginning of the winter semester over
there in January of 2002, but she'd just been kicked out of her foster home, with her abusive parents leaving her nothing but that perfect 4.0 GPA and perfect SAT scores.

Leigh had very particular ideas for her education, and wanted to start off in those particular classes, and didn't you know, she'd gone in dual enrollment as a teenager at a local community college and gotten some course credits already!

So it was a happy coincidence but definitely no surprise as, in the first week of the winter semester at the University of New Orleans, Monica Rambeau would enter her algebra class to find that there was a new student, and for some reason, this new student really needed some new friends and no one else would have her.

Monica, a bright and vivacious girl, was like her mother and her Auntie Carol, rather socially isolated at her age, and this made her a prime candidate for Leigh Marshall, who was also able to read a lot of her posts on online forums for folks having trouble fitting in, her loneliness, her desperation to impress her Auntie Carol. To Monica's credit, Leigh noted, she gave no hint that this Auntie Carol was the one and only Kree she was targeting, though she was posting occasionally on a forum dedicated to "The Alien Savior of 1995," and the forum had even adopted the nickname for this person that Monica had come up with.

So all Leigh had to do once they were seated next to each other to learn algebra was to awkwardly slip and fall and have a little doodle of hers fall out of her pink rainbow-encrusted backpack, her vague recreation of one of the few blurry pics of that individual, the words **CAPTAIN MARVEL** surrounded by hearts.

The rest, as the Terran expression goes, was history.

Chapter End Notes

Leigh Marshall is also real!

Been a particularly busy day for me today, been filling out job applications like mad because I want to get out of freelance or part-time work at long last, but I did write just a little, so please send lots of happy thoughts if you can because I need to get all that sorted.

Comments, suggestions, the like, you know where to put them!

- G
The Only Living Terran in New York

Chapter Summary

Carol's attempt to visit Peggy Carter and her mysterious husband has gone massively awry when the entire New York facility shuts down all at once. Even worse, Nick Fury is nowhere to be found! What the hell is going on? All Carol can do underground is search for info and she finds out some interesting info.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Carol, for her part, found herself quite occupied in New York.

She had decided not to leave C-53 just yet after all, at least not until she could meet with Peggy Carter and Grant Buchanan one last time, and this started a whole host of issues with the New York branch. The issues began when she arrived there and was promptly restrained by a whole horde of SHIELD agents lying in wait. Things escalated as she proceeded to use her photon blasts to promptly free herself, get restrained again, release herself again. She had only allowed them to restrain her at all just to mess with them, she would've gotten a whole lot angrier had she not immediately heard a directive from Peggy Carter ordering everyone to stand down, then an order from an agent calling himself Sitwell ("Jasper Sitwell, don't you forget it"), a bald man who he must be told her), that she must be restrained under Director Pierce's orders until she could be properly interrogated. She realized a little too late that it might be Pierce getting back at her for trying to sass him the last time they met. Sitwell was finally able to convince her to stand down by warning her of all the poor innocent agents she'd have to kill in order to get away.

Then the entire facility shut down a good several hours later. Every bit of power shut off at once, the entire building locked down, and by then it no longer mattered if Pierce was trying to sass her or not, because someone had just tried to assassinate him in Bogota as he was visiting that branch. Fury's branch. The details came out slowly, even as no one was able to leave the facility. No one had ever tried to assassinate the Director of SHIELD before. The rumors came in slowly, Carol was generally avoided by everyone, seeing her as a secondary concern, but she was able to pull enough of them aside to figure out more details. "Colombian rebels" were listed as those responsible, which the majority of people seemed to think was largely made up. A rebel militia couldn't possibly hope to threaten the military might of an agency of their size. They had kidnapped Pierce's daughter while the two were visiting.

A couple weeks passed in this fashion. As many times as Carol tried to contact Fury on the beeper, it would always send the signal, but the signal would never be returned. With a signal strength of the distance between the spiral arms of the Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies, Carol highly doubted it was not reaching him. Worse was that he was either not answering on purpose, someone had taken it from him, or that it had broken on his end.

She wasn't left with much to do. Everyone holed up and began trying as best they could to prepare for an attack on their branch, though none seemed really interested in getting any help from Carol. Agent Jasper Sitwell, the one who had initially tried to restrain her, was a thoroughly unpleasant sort and kept on trying to refuse her food and water, which she would casually take from one of
their many kitchens anyway, would blow holes through the floors and ceilings to get to where she wanted. Carol was so thoroughly pissed off at herself, so mad that she couldn't contact Maria or Monica. Sending the same signal to Talos got no response either.

So she spent those two weeks training herself more in one of the hangars, where nobody else seemed to go. She dragged a cot over there, kept on the Kree suit the whole time since it would automatically clean her with no need for Terran showers. She'd spend hours after hours testing her flight, testing the photon blasts against the hangar doors (even at top strength, the issue was that the doors were much thicker and surprisingly much stronger than Kree metal). All she could get out of some of the techs was that the defenses were made of a kind of metal they'd never seen before, a vibranium compound meant to reduce the amount needed to a tiny little speck, all taken from the remains of the huge chunk Howard Stark had stolen from Wakanda decades earlier. Compounded with steel and other metals, it lost the ability to absorb and release kinetic energy but became almost unbreakable. This was a development she wasn't expecting, which made a certain something about Terrans click. They tended to hoard their best technologies to themselves until it became cheap enough to mass produce, instead of spreading it out so everyone could equally benefit. This was how this New York branch could have equipment rivaling the Kree while the rest of the planet starved on a daily basis.

So she began digging around the private files, which without electrical power were no longer secured, and read as much as she could from the files concerning vibranium (the files were alphabetical, much easier than the library in New Orleans). They seemed to use a kind of code to obscure what they had created, but eventually a name came up since they didn't seem to try and hide names in the code for whatever reason, which sounded very strange for a secret organization. This name was the one that had created the metal that was serving as the shield around the complex, and Carol wrote down **DR. MYRON MACLAIN** in her notepad.

This Dr. MacLain had a SHIELD biography and everything, and had apparently been some sort of Terran prodigy, eventually getting a job after being discovered by Howard Stark during the early 1940s. Stealing the documents would probably raise an alarm once power was back on and they'd go around checking everything, so Carol simply went through everything with a pair of gloves she had found, jotting down as many notes as she could, hyperfocused on the mystery of the metal doors to occupy her time. Not much of a researcher, but it was worth looking into considering it was a metal even she couldn't break through. Dr. MacLain, apparently, had been one of the ones on the expedition to Wakanda to steal a chunk of vibranium from its only source, a massive asteroid hundreds of miles wide and tall within the country, that they'd been delicately mining for centuries and using to advance their technology. An alien metal of some sort, combined with the strongest Earth metals, but this invention had come after MacLain and Stark figured out how to manipulate vibranium into the shape of a disk, which would soon become Captain America's shield of all things.

After his disappearance in 1945, as Carol continued to decipher the strangely simple code they used to write in, MacLain continued experimenting with what little vibranium he had left over, Howard Stark largely abandoning the project to work on other sorts of things. This is how he became one of the first SHIELD employees, hired by Peggy Carter herself per Stark's recommendation. He spent a lot of time fiddling with the scraps and figuring out how to integrate it with other Earth metals and compounds like steel and titanium to bring out the best qualities of each, and eventually make a metal that was more brittle, less flexible, but many times stronger than vibranium.

The name for the metal appeared here, for some reason not coded at all: **ADAMANTIUM**.

It was only listed in a few sources, only used in a few places. Strangely, the New York branch
(where Peggy Carter still resided) and a separate independent contracting project MacLain had been hired for later on only designated as "Weapon" and suddenly the code for the document changed, stopped being so simple, as his own private notes used a much more complex code than what the strangely lax SHIELD codebreakers were coming up with.

She settled into a rhythm, losing track of time without a star or sun to keep track of. Notepad after notebook she kept stealing from wherever she could find them. She was largely left alone. Maybe the world had ended up top. At least once a day, she'd try to blast open the hangar doors again, each time at her greatest strength she only left a little burn mark. This was an isolation she was only used to during the days on Hala where she'd been made to repeat training exercises over and over, hardening her into a member of Starforce, and she would either adapt or go insane, those were the only two options Yon-Rogg had presented to her.

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On the one hand, Leigh Marshall privately noted, Zen-Pram had fucked up. Upon handing her extensive notes on Fury and the Rambeaus to Zen-Pram, he decided his first attempt to get at Vers would be to kill Nick Fury.

He had underestimated how deeply paranoid and easily spooked the Terrans could get, as she recorded her own notes on her datapad inside her brand new dorm room at the University of New Orleans. Her new friend Monica was very disappointed that they hadn't gotten a dorm together, but Leigh promised they'd hang out at least once a day and discuss strategies and fan theories. She already knew, of course, that Monica had gained the powers of the Tesseract as well. But she played stupid at how interested Monica was in all of this, played it like she was just another fangirl and didn't know Captain Marvel personally.

For a few good hours she had paced awkwardly and anxiously around her bare dorm room, no real decoration to speak of, no point since she wasn't planning on spending a whole amount of time there. They had all fallen out of contact at once, none had heeded her warning that perhaps a direct attack on a paramilitary facility may not be the best way to make an entrance. She wasn't worried about herself getting caught, since she doubted this Fury could operate Kree tech well enough to trace her from anywhere, but she did know that if Zen-Pram and the others failed, she'd likely not hear from the Supreme Intelligence again, and she was getting so bored. She wanted to infiltrate another planet, a more fun planet. Sure, this one had at least two Infinity Stones, but aside from that, so boring!

Leigh got the message back four hours later, still responding to every one of Monica's frequent and clingy texts with enthusiasm, and it wasn't entirely faked either! Despite her mission, despite how easily she knew she could take them out when the moment came, she had to admit herself that Monica was a very fun and witty person to talk to once she got out of her shell a little bit. Leigh did not dislike Terrans as a whole, but the mission did come first, and no amount of entertainment would come before that.

The message from Zen-Pram over her communicator: "Vers is trapped in the New York facility."

He sent then a list of schematics, all the digital files from the Bogota branch converted into Kree filetypes, it was interesting to note that since Fury had become Deputy Chief, Bogota had become the greatest store of digital information out of all of the SHIELD branches.

The same information Carol was now racking through on paper, all in easily readable form. Leigh buzzed through it and gossiped with Monica about possible Captain Marvel sightings (she and Monica knew for different reasons these were all fake, but she enjoyed the speculation just as much). She found the same file Carol found on paper, regarding this metal that was much stronger
than even the toughest of Kree alloys. The Terrans had made something useful after all. The schematics to develop this adamantium were nowhere to be found in the files, but Leigh made a mental note and a note on her datapad to keep an eye out for anything else.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay! A lot of personal stuff has been getting in the way of frequent posting but I'll try to keep that up to a more reasonable pace. Hope everyone is enjoying so far. I will say that the interesting bit of info found here isn't probably going to come up again, it was just a fun diversion.

Shorter chapters for now, till I can get enough time at once to write longer ones. Comments, suggestions, what have you, all of those go down below! Hope you're enjoying this!

Very soon I might begin fielding ideas of what I should write next after this is done, I don't remember if I mentioned this but the two I'm thinking of involve The Thunderbolts (team of supervillains, potentially a movie in the works so I might change the name) and a minor Hulk character called Doc Samson! Lemme know which is best!

- G
The Bogota branch of SHIELD abruptly shuts down after an assassination attempt, and the wrong person wrongfully assumes they were being targeted. Nicholas Fury is in for the fight of his life alone in Bogota as Carol continues to be trapped inside the New York branch, trapped by a sort of metal even she can't get through.

Meanwhile, Zen-Pram has one more little surprise prepared...

Fury wouldn't realize this about Pierce for another good decade, until he had gained access to Pierce's uncensored files and discovered the reasons why he had suddenly locked down every SHIELD facility on the planet and turned off all collective power, but Pierce was an insanely paranoid coward. Pierce had arrived without warning with a series of "political officers" (SHIELD code for "don't fucking ask, they're more important than you") and his own daughter in tow, looking for a tour of the facility from Fury personally, and he wasn't about to refuse his superior that request no matter how much he was known to rankle at authority figures. In retrospect, when all of the officers abruptly turned on several of his agents stationed there, pulling out weaponry only Fury had recognized, he should've known then that Pierce had been compromised in more ways than one.

At the time of the supposed assassination attempt and his daughter being taken (nice enough person, though Fury didn't even know her first name and she didn't say a word to anyone while being toured through his branch), Fury had taken Pierce at his word, even as Pierce remotely used his digital watch to shut down power to every branch at once. Fury's branch was quite small, only a single secured building, with maybe fifty or so people at max, mostly keeping track of digital file storage and occasional assignments for assassinations, reconnaissance and the lot wherever needed. Fury's time as Deputy Chief did not involve him doing a whole lot to try and stand out, as if he was compensating for how much attention he'd accidentally given himself during the 1995 debacle. Coulson and Barton had gone along with him, of course, and as per Barton's request, he'd even taken in his recruit of choice, the defected Soviet called Romanoff.

It was assumed that Coulson was Fury's second, and he was as close to one as anyone ever got with him, but the truth was that Fury never really had a proper person he trusted all that much within the agency. He held everyone save a select few at a wide berth, and it was this disconnect that meant that the moment he realized the two visitors he didn't recognize pull out guns he recognized, he reacted far faster than either Tir-Zar or Zyro had expected.

Zen-Pram's second fuckup was to send his two least experienced operatives to kill the Deputy Chief of the Bogota branch.

Fury would never forget the look of a Kree rifle, nor would he do anything other than toss himself across the room and open fire, even as Pierce inexplicably yelled out and pushed his own daughter away from him to turn and run, clicking his watch in the process, all of the power save the auxiliary shutting down at once. With the glowing blue lights along walls and floors, Fury could
see them dragging her away, guns drawn, trying to egg him out into the open, Pierce yelling at him to do something, anything.

In that panic, Fury would not recognize what a cowardly move it had been to cripple your own paramilitary force to save one person, who in retrospect may not even have been Pierce's actual daughter. A decade and change later, he'd watch this footage again from a hidden bunker and curse to himself loudly.

But now, he knew that the facility would be locked down until Pierce hit the watch again, and that he couldn't instantly do it without being convicted of treason. Take the Kree operatives out, Pierce screaming about "Colombian rebels" or some nonsense (which at the time, Fury thought was a code he didn't recognize, still respecting Pierce more than he deserved).

Pistol drawn, he made his ways through the corridors that he had, by now, memorized to a T. All he knew was that they were all stuck on this level and Coulson and Barton and Romanoff were probably trapped down below.

At the ending, the daughter slumped up against the wall, screaming in panic, and both Tir-Zar and Zyro attacked him at once, dressed in an awkward approximation of the local clothing. It would've been funny, like white Americans trying to dress like natives during Thanksgiving, if they weren't also trying to kill him.

Kree are, as an assimilated species and with their enhancements, including the ones they had just received, quite a match for most ordinary humans. Perhaps it's cliche to say Fury was no ordinary human, but he was the only human other than Maria Rambeau to get into a fight with these bastards and survive it, even killing some of them personally.

Fury won the fight for a couple reasons:

1. While both of them had been augmented in some way, some strange reddish-black light emanating from them, making their blows land like sledgehammers, fracturing whatever bone they hit on impact, they were also extremely uncoordinated and missed too often to give anything but fractures to ribs and bruises to stomachs, which Fury was used to.

2. All Kree fought in the same uniform method, dangerous against untrained indigenous populations but only fairly competent against a well-trained Deputy Chief like Fury was.

It went on quite a while, and the security cameras were included in secondary power so the whole fight, a man well into middle age holding his own against what appeared to be a couple very well-trained young men wearing masks obscuring their blue skin, and Fury had long tried to remember how they fought, and even read and re-read all the writings of Skrull scholars researching Kree military tactics that Talos and Soren had lent him before leaving in 1995. So he had spent years preparing for this out of paranoia, which finally ended up rewarding him greatly in this particular fight.

Even after that particular fight, it wasn't exactly over yet. Zen-Pram hadn't just recruited those individuals into his unit, because a secondary unit had been sent as well, filled with Kree grunts who had been dishonored in some way and if they killed one measly little Terran, some of that lost honor with the Supreme Intelligence would be immediately restored. The Supreme Intelligence itself promised this openly, and like the zealots they had been programmed to be, they eagerly took up the assignment. Fury still wasn't entirely sure how, but this secondary unit had somehow found a way into figuring out SHIELD's coded language and infiltrating Pierce's office as the proper designation to be given access to a SHIELD branch of their choice. If they hadn't been Kree, Fury would've never presumed that they were targeting him personally, but he also wasn't about to let
Pierce knew that, even as much as Fury still respected him then.

Ergo why Fury spent the most arduous two weeks of his life alone against them. Tir-Zar and Zygo had been the best fighters out of all of them, none of the rest were that good, that's why they were only grunts. But just because they were grunts didn't mean they didn't heavily outnumber Fury. Monica would have called this a *Die Hard* scenario had she been there. Multiple times Carol's beeper would go off and every time another small group would be alerted to him. Outwardly he cursed, but inwardly he wasn't sure where Carol was, what was going on. It would be a difficult couple weeks for both of them, for different reasons.

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Things hadn't gone exactly as planned, but those couple weeks did give Zen-Pram time he needed to prepare a little more.

The theft of the Aether itself had gone off without a hitch, but it was the getting back that caused some issues, and it had been the moment where Asgardians started turning up dead everywhere that Zen-Pram realized that perhaps hiring a professional battle-slave into his battle force was not the best moment for him. Roco-Bai had immediately disobeyed orders, gone off into the darkness, using the sensors attached to his suit, and began killing with abandon. This turned their stealthy retreat into a hurried one, the only thing that saved them was that the Asgardians had no real ranged capabilities save for crossbows and those harmlessly bounced off their ship as they all headed out into orbit, the Aether contained safely inside Zen-Pram's gauntlet.

The entirety of the squad, minus Devros, who couldn't keep the bemused smile off his face at the turn of events, expectantly waiting to see exactly how Zen-Pram would respond to this intentional disobedience. As soon as they were safely away, fully aware that the Asgardians were likely going to go on alert for this, hoping against all hope that the royal family didn't get involved, Zen-Pram made his way to the smiling Roco-Bai, visible even beneath his large unwieldy helmet of his battle-slave suit.

"Clearly you're going to kill no matter what I tell you."

"Mm hm," said Roco-Bai, the only one satisfied with how things turned out.

"Alright," said Zen-Pram, "you win. We're both going to get what we want."

"How so?"

Now it was Zen-Pram's turn to smile. "You'll see."

The ship continued on its course for its next destination, but very distinctively not C-53, not anymore, as Zen-Pram began to explain the plan. The first would involve the other lesser squadron he'd been putting together going with Tir-Zar and Zyro to kill the friend of this traitor Kree, the one called Nicholas Fury and the one currently possessing the Tesseract. He would be going to a different section of the continent personally to make contact with Leigh Marshall.

"Why are we no longer headed directly there?" Phae-Dor asked curiously.

"You'll see once we get there. As it turns out, we're being contracted for a job outside of the Kree empire, and the potential for a true partnership between this entity and the Supreme Intelligence."

"A partnership?" Devros asked.

"Indeed," said Zen-Pram, "but I'll let En-Vad explain that part. He's proven most useful in this
En-Vad began to explain, as they prepared the Kree pod attached to the ship to launch Tir-Zar and Zyro to C-53, where they would join and lead the rest of the squadron into the part of the planet called Bogota, where this Fury served as a paramilitary expert of some kind.

En-Vad explained what the rest of them would be doing, though Zen-Pram had just decided to send one more member along with the two departing Kree, heading to an entirely different part of the planet, based on the info Leigh had sent him.

Everyone smiled now, wider and wider as En-Vad continued to explain. This was perfect.

"Who's this?" Monica Rambeau asked innocently.

"This," said Leigh Marshall, "is someone I never expected to see again."

She was currently in an embrace, arms wrapped around the middle, of a much older man with a trimmed and clipped white beard and white hair, looking like the most buff and in-shape Santa Claus that Monica had ever seen.

"I can't believe you're here and you're safe, and that you're making friends," said the fit Santa Claus.

"I never expected to see my uncle again, like my actual blood-uncle and everything!"

"I've been searching all over for you."

"Monica, would it be OK if we got some time alone to reconnect? I promise I'll see you after, this is just so unexpected."

"Yeah, of course."

"So you're Monica!" The fit Santa Claus said, sticking out a hand for her to shake. "She's told me all about you. Call me Zen."

Chapter End Notes

I was meaning to post yesterday, but yesterday was an insanely awful day for a whole host of reasons so I will be posting twice today, because I was gonna commemorate having posted for about a month or so.

So the next chapter will be posted immediately after this one, and I kinda did something out of character and typed them both up one after the other because I couldn't sleep anyway.

Hope you're enjoying! Tell your friends if they've been looking for this sort of thing! Put it on your resume!

Also if you guess why the chapter is called what it is, you get a cookie!
What You Once Were Yourself

Chapter Summary

Carol faces off against her strongest foe yet, the Kree known only as Roco-Bai the Shatterax. A dangerous and sadistic opponent, one who has never lost a match before, nothing but her wits and her powers against him. It's a match for the ages inside the heart of a metal fortress, the Terran and the Kree, all bets are off. Winner takes all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Carol screamed herself awake at the sensation of a claw being driven through her shoulder. It was not a conventional way for one to wake up, and after the number of days she'd been in the hangar alone, heading to the secured room of files to research more, notebook after notebook filled with scribblings and all sorts of info she would press Fury on if she ever saw him again.

She'd taken off the Kree suit after discovering a shower in a nearby break room, a communal shower that nobody else seemed to be using, and she'd began dressing in some SHIELD casual wear, a t-shirt and sweatpants with the logo.

She'd regret this. The Kree suit would've partially protected against claws jutting out of a Kree battle-slave suit.

Carol yelled out again and kicked outwards with all of her might, pushing the form she couldn't recognize possessing the claw up and away, but also splashing a fresh wave of blood all over her clothes. It was a clean puncture, all the way through, an attack so uncoordinated that it had only hit muscle and not bone. Still hurt like hell, still made her almost cry out before being able to steel herself through it and keep to her feet, barefoot and only wearing a t-shirt and sweats, thoroughly unprepared.

The secondary power had more lights in the hangar anywhere else, so it was the best lit area out of the lot, so she hadn't been in complete darkness for this whole time like it was in the file room. It was enough to catch a glimpse and at least recognize the battle-slave suit as what it was even if she didn't recognize who was in it. She had never bothered paying attention to those while on Hala, but she knew a battle-slave was among the most dangerous Kree out there.

Shit. They had found her.

The battle-slave leapt at her, cackling with glee, being rebuffed by a photon blast from her one remaining arm. Carol was having too much trouble controlling the arm she'd stabbed. It needed attention fast, and she only had a couple seconds to try and redirect some of it to trying to heal the wound before he leaped again and Carol cursed as she narrowly avoided the swing of the claw.

Just enough to slow the bleeding to a trickle. She had a little more time, a couple more seconds to heal it a little more, but an attempt to move the arm only opened up the wound a little more. Carol may have to risk it. This was not a time for an extended fight. She was only grateful she'd gotten so bored that she'd spent a lot of this time training for a fight regardless.
The battle-slave slid to a halt on his claws, trying to gain purchase in the floor but being unable to, and pouncing yet again. Carol was a hair too slow this time, and she let out another yell as the claws sliced her cheek down to her collar bone. This was the strategy, Carol could tell already, the death of a thousand cuts. She'd never seen this one fight, but the claws on the suit had to be for opening up enough small wounds that the enemy couldn't keep up. There could even be...

Yes, she felt it now, struggling against it, a sleeping agent smeared on the edges of the claws. The impacts had been just slight enough that it hadn't fully worked, she was still conscious. It was a time-limit now. Carol had always prided herself on being able to figure out enemy strategies, but the downside was that they could be very effective regardless. She was trying to remember sleeping agent, she'd never actually experience its effects in such a large dose, it had been used as tranquilizers against Skrull but never applied to a melee weapon such as this one. God, she just wanted to sleep--

Carol slipped and avoided another blow by accident, sweeping out instinctively to interrupt the battle-slave's momentum. He may very well have been why the SHIELD agents had stopped responding. Fuck fuck fuck fuck.

"Fuck fuck fuck fuck," she murmured to herself, trying to track his movements around the growing drowsiness, knowing that he must be trying to hit her enough times to knock her out, and then she'd never feel anything again.

"I am Roco-Bai, the Shatterax," the battle-slave yelled proudly from several feet away, though Carol's vision was beginning to blur and she was having trouble tracking him. "Impressive you've held on so long. I was told you'd be a tough one.

"Yeak, OK," was all she had energy to say before firing off a photon blast in his direction. She heard the slight yelp of a slight impact and then Roco-Bai said back: "good aim, missy! Very good aim! But not good enough!" Carol heard the movement of another pounce and rolled out of the way, yelling out again as the wound on her shoulder opened up more. She supposed that all she could do now was to try the new trick she'd been practicing and see if that helped at all.

She waited till she heard Roco-Bai pounce again and reached out with both hands. A loud impact and a loud yelp told her she'd at least succeeded at this much, as a portion of her Kree suit, for one of the shoulders, hit Roco-Bai squarely in the face and knocked him off of his feet onto the ground, where he kept slipping against the adamantium floor. Carol tried her best to square up into a fighting pose as the photon energy instinctively redirected the portions of her armor out of the handbag lying several feet away, and slowly assembling itself onto her, the armor seeming to float onto her from midair. Tracking the movement again, one of her boots smacked him in the face and back to the floor before she lifted up a foot and caught it on there, then catching the other. The impact nearly knocked her over, her vision blurring a little more, getting even sleepier, but she held the pose, waiting for him.

"You're going to regret that, missy," said Roco-Bai, trying to pull himself up on his claws, not expecting the floor to not be able to accommodate his claws. "I am the Shatterax on Hala, and you shall be my greatest victory."

"Oh shut up," Carol said angrily, and threw herself in the direction of his voice, but yelling out again, taking another swipe across the face and over the bridge of her nose, being thrown back to skid across the floor. The claws were serrated, these wounds were jagged, she was so sleepy now, it would all end here, all for nothing.

"Goodnight, missy," she heard Roco-Bai cackling, another leap and a pounce and in one last desperate motion, she used the last of her strength and photon energy to propel herself up from the
floor and onto him, the two tumbling into a heap on the ground. She took a blunt hit to the face from one of his fists, which she grabbed, the claw digging into the palm of her hand. Carol yelled out at the top of his lungs while Roco-Bai laughed and laughed and laughed, and then screamed himself as the momentum of the blow allowed her to thrust blindly at his neck and dig a little into it with his own claw. It was not just blue Kree blood that came out, instead it was the same kind of theran-fluid that powered the datapads, a greener shade of blue, and it wasn't coming from his skin, rather the parts that made up the battle-slave suit.

"Not fair! Not fair!" Roco-Bai screamed through his pain. "We recorded you! We watched you! We learned from you! I learned how to kill you, I studied your movements, the Supreme Intelligence promised I would win--"

And then a muffled yelp as Carol was now able to see enough to drive her other fist through his mask and crunching his nose, more theran-fluid flowing outwards, the other fist driving itself in and going for his eyes, the fluid healing the gaping slice in her hand.

He kicked out with his own leg and she flew off of him, covered with red Terran blood and blue Kree blood (**my blood is red!**), looking at him confused, coughing and hacking, as Roco-Bai pulled himself to his feet, never wounded this badly before.

"Supreme Intelligence was tracking you! Then little Terran girl messed with datapad and you changed colors and it couldn't anymore! Couldn't study you after that! No fair!"

It all clicked into place, Monica messing with her datapad to change the colors from sickly green and silver to her red and blue and yellow she had grown to like so much. She had accidentally switched off the recording device inside her suit. There was a recording device?

Oh my god, she thought. The Supreme Intelligence saw so much. It saw Fury and Monica and--Maria.

Carol leaped with a scream of rage and confusion and hurt at Roco-Bai, who, not expecting it, screamed and put his hands out, as she knocked him to the ground again.

"Where's the recorder?" Carol asked. "On our suits. Where is it?"

"Datapad!" Roco-Bai choked out.

"How is it powered?"

"Remotely, with solar energy!"

"Good," said Carol, and hit him again, right where she'd punched him in the nose earlier, causing him to yell out even more and try to struggle to get away.

"The other Terrans?"

"Dead, every one!" Roco-Bai yelled through his pain.

"Not good," Carol said, hit him again and again and again and again Roco-Bai struggled and screamed louder, struggling, convulsing in pain underneath her, but he was far too weakened now, beginning to get drowsy off the sleeping agent himself. He swiped at her with his left arm, catching her again, but she was able to catch it as the claw dug into her shoulder.

Carol turned the left arm holding the datapad similar to her own up to her face. "You see this?" She
said, knowing the Supreme Intelligence was looking back, seeing her reflection with two kinds of blood dripping on it.

"I'm going to do worse to you!" She yelled, and then yelled out in a different way as Roco-Bai took the moment to reverse the footing and try to get her back on the ground, throwing her clear away. Carol could barely see anymore, she could only see a vague blur rushing in her direction, and all she could do was reach out and almost blindly let off a photon blast in the direction of the blur. She heard impact, and a yell from Roco-Bai, and the sound of a body flying high up into the air, that body struggling to maintain itself, and then gravity taking over, and a loud noise that suggested the body had landed in the worst possible way for its occupant.

The vague blur did not move. Carol slowly pulled herself to her feet, her wounds slowly healing, her vision returning to show Roco-Bai motionless on the ground.

Never vicious enough. Never brutal enough. She was now. Carol looked into the datapad, seeing what she realized now was the recorder, thanking every god out there Monica had broken hers by accident, panting and heaving for breath, and hated the way she looked, hated what she had done to this thing even if it had been in self-defense, and drove a fist through it, photon energy surrounding it to cushion her hand from the impact.

Dripping in blood, she reached over and grabbed one of the water bottles she'd been drinking out of, pouring it out and beginning to use the photon energy to scoop the theran-fluid inside. It was morbid, but it was a healing agent as well and she didn't have enough photon energy left for proper healing. She filled one water bottle and enough as it now slowly drained up, scooping it up off the ground, filling four or five bottles, knowing it would last for months.

The areas the theran-fluid had splashed her were already beginning to heal, the pain remaining but the function returning. She didn't know how to think or feel right now, she'd just been attacked in the most secure facility on the entire planet and who knows how many this thing had taken out before getting to her. She didn't even hear it in her sleep. She could've saved them. If she'd stayed up all night, she'd have saved them. If they were dead.

As she slowly but delicately wiped the fluid on herself, especially on the shoulder, the wound slowly but surely beginning to regenerate skin and muscle and nerves that it would need, the power suddenly kicked back on. The doors leading out of the hangar suddenly opened and agents she didn't recognize stormed into the room and stopped dead upon seeing her, bloody and beaten like this. The theran-fluid wouldn't fix all her wounds, but it would prevent her from getting an infection. That shoulder wound was potentially mortal if not for it.

Guns drawn, but very hesitantly, the agents all quietly talking into their walkies. With this much depleted from her, as tired as she was, even with the theran-fluid counteracting the sleeping agent, she still knew they could easily take her out in this state.

All of the agents suddenly stepped into a twin lined formation and saluted all at once towards each other, as a pair of boots began to walk at a fast pace towards the entrance. Walking into it, Nicholas J. Fury entered the room, and though his expression was impassive and stoic, Carol could see tears beginning to flow in his one remaining eye. She recognized this as a moment where she probably needed to be a bit more formal than she normally would be.

"Deputy Chief Fury," she said, trying to remain calm, "you should've seen the other guy."

Fury laughed in his Professional Mode laugh, clearly in "character," and walked over, standing in front of her, hands clasped behind his back, Goose following at his side, who nuzzled up to her and began to eagerly lick at the theran-fluid.
"Miss Danvers," Fury said, "We were very lucky to have you here to meet this clown. You should've seen the guys on my end."

"No offense, Fury, as glad as I am to see you after all this time," she was very tempted to wink despite her condition, "you're a very long way from Bogota, last I checked."

Fury turned to regard the saluting agents, none of whom had moved a muscle since he entered the room. "I suppose, considering the circumstances, you didn't hear the news, so let me fill you in. Alexander Pierce has been rewarded for his brave defense of the Bogota branch and for his successful defense of the Kree invaders by being named as Undersecretary to the World Security Council. They need a man like him with them in these turbulent times."

"I don't understand," Carol said, unable to keep up Professional Mode any longer.

Another set of footsteps as the man she recognized as Phillip Coulson practically skipped into the room, eyes widening at the deceased Kree on the floor before her, standing at attention next to Fury.

"Hello, Miss Danvers," he said, "I suppose you've heard by now that Director Fury is, well, the new Director of SHIELD."

Carol blinked for a few moments. Fury? Director?

"In charge of all of it?" She finally asked, causing Fury and Coulson both to laugh their Professional Laughs.

Coulson looked delighted. Fury's expression was impassive, but his remaining eye looked horrified.

Chapter End Notes

Roco-Bai, I forgot to add, is actually one of the members of the comics version of Starforce, and so I figured a modified version of him here would do nicely. This is also the first I wrote since seeing Far From Home and so far, we are still canon! That movie was absolutely amazing, if you haven't already seen it, you owe it to yourself to see Jake Gyllenhaal in action!

Luckily the events here were always told very vaguely, so this is my interpretation of them. We've made it a whole month while technically being canon! We'll see how long the streak lasts!

- G
Carol and Fury begin to discuss the changes that will be in store after his abrupt promotion as the Director of SHIELD. All of it? All of it. The whole she-bang. Every last bit. This new transition will be met with a couple unexpected visitors as they fly to a more secure location, but it's something of a reunion for all.

"All of it?" Carol asked one more time.

"All of it," Fury said sadly. They were no longer in New York, but she'd gotten word from Peggy Carter and Grant Buchanan that they were immediately stopping what they were doing and moving as fast as they could to meet them in the Atlanta branch, where Keller had once resided, as the New York branch was rendered inactive effectively immediately till the situation could be rectified. Carol had wordlessly removed the battle-slave armor and left the body for anyone else to analyze.

The Quinjet they were taking to the Atlanta branch was not being flown by Maria, and Carol did not recognize the pilot.

"She doesn't know," Fury said, "I can't have her here for what comes next."

"What's that?"

"I'm going to be briefed by Madam Carter and Agent Buchanan. Pierce isn't going, he's too busy having his wounds patched up. They attacked me in Bogota too. Was there for two damn weeks on my lonesome. Seems like we both had shit to deal with."

"Yeah," said Carol. "God, I can't think."

"We're getting you checked as soon as you're there, but we're locking down the facility. My first order as...fucking Director."

"You don't want the job?"

"Of course I don't want it!" Fury yelled out, and then shrank a little bit. "I don't want it. I don't want this. Being a Deputy Chief was easy, I could pursue whatever I felt like was worth pursuing, Bogota was outside of American jurisdiction and nobody cared and nobody gave us any mind. I knew it was the position before Director, but I thought nothing of it. Keller came from the Atlanta branch, and even that was considered to be highly unusual. It's usually New York, Los Angeles, Washington. Just them. Maybe London or Paris. The bigger the city, the higher up you're supposed to be. I thought Colombia wouldn't matter to these silver spoon licking assholes!"

Carol sat silently for a few moments and said, "Why did you join SHIELD if you hate it so much?"

"I don't hate SHIELD," Fury said tonelessly, "I hate the bureaucracy. I joined to be a soldier. I'm good at that. I'm very good at following orders and I'm horrible at giving them and I could let ass-
kissers like Coulson mostly operate on their own as long as they didn't do anything too unethical, which they didn't!" He pulled himself to his feet, steadying himself against his chair. The two weeks had been insanely rough on him. He was in very good shape for his age but that didn't mean it wasn't taking a toll. "I made damn sure they didn't do what other branches did. I checked them religiously. I'm sure some of them resented me for it. I would make sure that if someone absolutely had to die that they absolutely deserved it. No union busting, no helping corporations make sure indigenous women couldn't produce breast milk or kill people protesting Coca-Cola or whatever. I went after the worst of the worst. White supremacist groups, fundamentalist Christian militias, rich assholes placing the wrong bets. I ruffled a lot of feathers and did my paperwork to get away with it."

"It is," Fury said after a few moments of silence, "so goddamn hard doing this without you. I know that's not possible. But even so."

Carol just sat, the blood still hadn't been cleaned off of her, but it had dried and wasn't staining the seats of the Quinjet at all.

"The second this was out, Pierce called the World Security Council and demanded a spot, demanded that it was time for him to join their ranks, that he just repelled an alien invasion and that was more than any of them could claim. Then he said that he was deeming me the new Director of SHIELD, right then and there."

"Holy shit," was all Carol could manage.

"Holy shit is right."

"Why did you accept?"

"Have you seen SHIELD?" Fury said, "If I don't take it, I don't know who's going to. I don't know what they'll do or who can buy their allegiance or whether or not they'll help folks. We're not as large of an organization as we like to appear. We've only really got branches in a few countries and we mostly survive off of subsidies from the World Security Council."

"The group that Pierce leveraged your attack to join?"

"There's no higher than that on this planet, Carol. The American president isn't as powerful as them. Lot of conspiracy theorists out there thinking it's the Illuminati, it's not. Just the World Security Council, and it's considered unheard of to even know the identity of just one of its members and now I do."

"And you don't want to be there?"

"Oh hell no. This is already too much. I don't know how to manage an organization across an entire planet, Carol. That's collectively a few thousand agents, accountants, technicians, mechanics, developers, god knows what else, all of that to manage. Deputy Chief is as high as only a few people go. I was considered insanely lucky to get just that. But it's usually the one in charge of Washington, which is what Pierce had been the Deputy Chief of, who is considered to get the job after Madam Carter founded us."

"I'm sorry."

Fury stopped and stared out of the window, at the landscape whizzing by him too fast for him to keep track of, which felt very relevant to his current situation. His paycheck was about to jump up. He didn't like that. All he had ever wanted was to make just a living, and he knew how petty it was
to complain about being rich, much more so than before. He was going from high six figures to potentially high seven figures, knowing his luck. He'd just wanted enough to live on and he just wanted to help people. Even the portion of his Deputy Chief salary he had been putting into Monica's tuition had been practically a drop in the bucket. God.

"What kind of people are we, Carol? We hate running into trouble and we have no choice but to keep looking for it. Several crazy weeks, with the towers falling and you coming back and goddamn Yon-Rogg and now these assesholes. It's been like what, four months? Fuck."

"I don't mean to put more pressure on you," Carol said, "but we still have Kree to think about. That's a bigger concern than any...what did you call those guys?"

"Terrorists. They're nothing compared to the Kree. I know what's gonna happen next, and there's nothing I'll be able to do to stop any of that, we'll attack a country in the Middle East, come up with a BS excuse, enough people will support it anyway, thousands of soldiers will die for no reason, but we'll get our fuel sources that we need. I can't stop that. But I can make sure that another alien civilization lets us do that, because the alternative is, potentially, no more humanity."

"They're going after me. I'm the reason this is happening. I'll leave, and I'll take them with me."

"Bullshit," Fury said, "Of course they're going after you. But you're not leaving, not like this."

"I was leaving anyway!"

"Yeah, with the option to come back. What's to say they don't bomb us into the prehistoric era just because? I killed some of them, Maria killed some of them. What's to say they're not after us too?"

"They waited an awful long time to get back at you."

"Stop being facetious," Fury said, almost smiling at that, "You said they knew who we were because there was a recorder in your datapad, and that Monica accidentally broke it."

"Yes," Carol said with a smile, "Lieutenant Trouble strikes again."

"Monica may have just saved all our asses again," Fury said, "Because I told you so much classified info after that point. Not a whole lot before, I can live with that. So without them being able to track you, we're pretty much home free as long as we don't make a public stink anywhere or alert them to our presence."

"Well every Kree has one. I didn't know this until Stabby over there," she motioned to the pile of battle-slave armor on the floor, "alerted me to it, and Yon-Rogg never told me. Just goes to show how little the Supreme Intelligence actually trusted any of us."

"You know, you never actually told me what this Supreme Intelligence is like, how to fight it, how to kill it. Because we no longer have the option to twiddle our thumbs, nothing is more dangerous to humanity than that thing."

"It takes the appearance of whoever means the most to you, that's all I know. Mar-Vell is who appears for me."

"Hmm," Fury said. "I think you need to contact Talos."

"I should," said Carol, it had completely slipped her mind. She pulled out her own beeper, giving Fury an apologetic look for the amount of times she'd tried to call him with it, and activated it again, to Talos' frequency.
A different voice boomed over the speaker.

"Vers? Is this Vers?" Carol's eyes widened, but not before Talos' voice cut in and said "I'm fine, mate! It's kind of a long story but there is yet another interested party who wishes to speak with you."

"Vers," said the voice of Frigga, "I really do need to speak with you when you have a chance."

"Might as well join the party down here, if you can track our location."

"I can," said Frigga, "your Skrull friends will be joining too, if you don't mind."

"Of course I don't, but--"

Suddenly a loud flash of rainbow light hit the Quinjet, keeping it in place. Fury drew his gun and threw himself over the nearest chair to provide some cover, but Carol didn't move at all. Finally, someone who didn't have a one hundred percent chance of trying to kill her.

Then Frigga was sitting in the seats opposite where they had been seated before, Talos and Soren looking very confused but sitting right next to her. The two Skrulls immediately made a beeline for Carol and embraced her, although they did grimace slightly, the smell of Kree blood must be very sickening to them. Talos, though, noted the wound on Carol's forehead and the dried red Terran blood.

"That's real blood," he said very proudly, "I waited a long time to see that poison finally out of your system."

"You like it?" Carol asked, somewhat sarcastically.

Talos put both hands on her shoulders. "It's been so long, mate. I'm so damn proud of you. We had a lot happen on our end, but we're surviving and we're going to make it through. The Daughter is still on Tarnax, situation's too fraught to risk it. But she sends her regards and misses you dearly."

Soren moved Carol's face around, looking her over curiously. "I never saw a Terran bleed before, but I think red is a color that suits you very much, goes along better with that outfit of yours."

"Hmmph," Carol said, but she smiled very relieved up at Soren, glad to see one more friendly face.

Soren looked over to Fury, pulling himself up from his perch behind the chair, and chuckled. "Good to see you're still as ready as ever."

"Well don't scare me like that next time."

"Oaf," said Soren.

"Ass," said Fury, and the two embraced before he embraced Talos as well.

They all sat down so Fury could regard the newcomer to the Quinjet. He reached over to a button on the side of the wall, clicked it, and said inside of it, "You will not leave your station until the passenger and I have disembarked, copy?"

"Copy, Director Fury," said the voice on the other end, presumably the pilot.

"Did he see...all that?" Fury asked Frigga.

"No," said Frigga, "He didn't feel or see a thing. I understand this planet is in a bit of a situation
thanks to the Kree."

"You're not one of them. Kree don't know how to do that...right?" Fury gave a concerned look to Carol.

"No," Carol said, "She's not a Kree. She's an Asgardian."

"No shit?" Fury said, looking at Frigga incredulously. "One of the Nordic mythical people. My god, today is too interesting."

Frigga just laughed, looking supremely calm in comparison to the others.

Chapter End Notes

I forgot to mention earlier on that Keller has no first name in the movie! So I named him Benjamin Keller because his actor, the great Ben Mendelsohn, is a great actor! On the wiki, he is listed as R. Keller and I wrote the previous chapter starring Talos as him again before reading it, so he will now be Benjamin R. Keller.

Bruce Banner's real first name is Robert and Bruce is his middle name so don't @ me!

Anyway! Frigga is back! I loved writing her so much that I found a very contrived reason to bring her back, she will not be around for long, but she may know one other character more than she's letting on. Guess which one!

Also, the title for this one is a reference for a game I have never played. I apologize to any fans of that.

- G
The New Director of SHIELD

Chapter Summary

Nicholas J. Fury has unexpectedly been chosen as the next Director of SHIELD, a job that he most assuredly doesn't want but a job he will nonetheless take in order to make sure no one with any nefarious intentions can get access to those kind of resources. He's going to do things differently from previous Directors, for he's got an enemy in mind that the rest of the planet doesn't know yet. SHIELD's new enemy, like it or not, are the Kree.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Talos and Soren took their usual forms while around SHIELD agents, while Frigga, with a wave of her hand, somehow had her regal clothing morph into a business suit, making her look like a SHIELD higher up that nobody at the new branch would recognize.

Everyone would salute Fury as the small group headed by, some of them even gave Carol a salute too, which she was not too pleased to see, it meant that she was known by all of SHIELD now. "Captain Marvel," she heard one whisper to another.

"What?" Carol said, stopping her tracks to glare at both of the SHIELD agents.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, um, that's what they call you."

"Where?"

The SHIELD agent pulled from a nearby table a strange monitor device that was much smaller than the ones she was used to, showing her the screen. On it, a drawing, a rough estimation of her outfit but without her face being seen, along the text CAPTAIN MARVEL on the left side and THE ALIEN SAVIOR OF 1995 on the right.

"What is this?"

"Yes, agent, what is this?" Fury asked, walking over in Professional Mode and glaring at the agent with his one eye.

"Director Fury!" The agent practically squeaked out, before explaining, "it's, um, an online forum, sir. Started after she," motioning at Carol, who kept on glaring, "fought off the alien fleet in '95."

"They're called Kree, agent, don't forget about that."

"They are."

"Indeed," said Fury, "you're the first lucky bastard to get a glimpse of how things are going to change very soon. We have a new enemy in our presence, and it sure as hell ain't Al Qaeda. They're bad, the Kree makes them look like sissies."

"It's not?"
"Yes sir," said Fury, "We're not concerning ourselves with them, there's someone worse. They're called the Kree, and this woman right here," he nodded at Carol, "is the only one who knows how to stop them. But tell me more about this forum."

"Fury, you don't need to brag, that's hardly--" Carol tried to say, but she was interrupted by the agent.

"Well it's a forum speculating about her, and what her name is, and where she's from, and there's lots of theories as to who she could possibly be. Latest one," he checked the top post, "is an elaborate theory claiming that she's actress Gwyneth Paltrow."

He clicked on the link, and a picture of a strangely familiar looking person popped up, but she didn't look even close.

Carol pushed past the agent, who let out another squeak at the impact, and began to read the comments, a little curious as to what they were saying about her. She was more than a little surprised that the vast majority of comments were all positive. The good news is that it didn't seem as though anyone here knew what she looked like or what her real name was.

But then suddenly she stopped dead, put a hand over her mouth, because suddenly one of the words that designated the account of a particular Terran stood out to her, a passionate defense of her and why she was a hero for the whole planet.

**MRambeau**

Carol silently motioned to Fury to look at the screen with her. "Fuck," said Fury, "we're going to check as soon as we're done with the debriefing, and that's that."

"That's that," Carol said again, roughly shoving the laptop back into the agent's arms.

"For the record," she said, "my name is Vers. I don't care who you tell that to."

She stomped off, everyone else now following her closely, overhearing the agent say to the other: "Dude, she shoved me."

"You got shoved by an alien!"

"She doesn't even look like Gwyneth Paltrow!"

"Yeah, that one's kinda skinny, she's a bit more buff," was the last she she overheard before the elevator doors Fury led her and the others into slid shut, and they began making their way down to the basement of the facility.

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Fury's office as Acting Director of SHIELD (but most assuredly permanent, as Coulson had excitedly told them before his face fell in disappointment like a Terran canine being denied a morsel or tidbit) was much more humble, according to what agents at the Atlanta branch would begin gossiping about a few days later. In fact, everything about the transfer of power between Pierce and Fury would feel slightly off in comparison to what the long-timers had gotten used to. Madam Carter had set a precedent that no previous director of SHIELD had ever broken, she would deliver internal memos, televised speeches, she'd make sure there was a constant feeling that she was communicating with every member of the organization personally. Those who had been there from the beginning (so only the ones who had openly supported her) all fondly looked at this time. Some referred to Margaret "Peggy" Carter as the Walt Disney of intelligence officers and that
statement was actually pretty spot-on. All directors after tried to imitate this, tried to be public figures within the organization, constantly make themselves the center of attention as they misinterpreted everything she was trying to do.

Nicholas J. Fury became infamous very quickly for doing away with all of that. Direct communication from Fury was extremely rare. Anyone who may try to check into him a little bit would see just how much time he was taking up keeping track of various assignments different departments were assigned to. Keller had probably been the "worst" overall director as a pussyfooting ass-kissing show-off who tended to compromise security too often with various affairs. But the endorsement of Keller, Pierce and (to everyone's surprise) Carter meant that Fury operated very separately from everyone else, made chain of command incredibly vague on purpose, and tended not to interact with anyone unless he had to.

Fury already had developed a reputation in the seven years since he had met Carol for the first time. He had been the very first Terran in human history to have definitively encountered an extraterrestrial and survive. Had his job not been so secretive, this was the sort of thing that got you permanently remembered in children's textbooks. He had apparently been tortured by these alien bastards, who apparently called themselves the Kree, and they burned off one of his eyes and he still wouldn't snap! Until he was Director, Fury rarely let out any information on what had happened, but his first directive was to release an internal memo describing the Kree in as much detail as Carol, Talos and Soren could remember, leaving out the bits he didn't want them knowing about, like the Tesseract itself.

Concerning Carol, Fury identified her only as Vers, a human being who had been kidnapped and forcibly assimilated into the group until managing to break free of their control. She was, now and forever, an ally of SHIELD and of humanity, and if anyone dared to leak this information, Fury would use every means at his disposal to make their lives hell. The Kree were everywhere, their technology dwarfed theirs in their power, and the last thing any idiot would want to do is accidentally reveal their single trump card.

Carol, personally, didn't like that she seemed to be described as nearly invincible, but Fury insisted it was more to get people off her back than anything else. If they saw her as this invincible entity, they wouldn't cause her any more trouble.

Fury went on to note that their current primary objective was to track down and eliminate the Kree, in all its forms, and that they were an enemy of peace and prosperity for the planet. Let the military concern themselves with insurgent groups, SHIELD would concern itself for whoever was waiting for humanity to weaken themselves so they could pick off the scraps. To Benjamin Keller's surprise, he awoke from a binge a few weeks later to discover he'd signed a document enforcing all of this, along with Carter and Pierce. He didn't remember this at all and Fury recommended taking it easy with his more self-destructive habits.

That being said, in the same drafted document, Fury stated that his primary goal as Director of SHIELD was to eliminate and anticipate threats the rest of humanity couldn't possibly comprehend, that he was deeply humbled by the assignment, and that he had no interest in anything that did not directly benefit the association. So this is how the rumors began that Fury's office still remained quite humble and practical, that he made it a habit to release his personal expenses every year (minus the cost of Monica's tuition), so people could double and triple check and see how frugally he lived, to prove the point that he had no interest in anything but the mission.

This rankled people at first, but Fury would ultimately become the last Director of SHIELD, and would make it through the next couple decades with his honor mostly intact for this. This was the moment where the legend truly began to grow, the man who was the only personal confidante of
the mysterious alien woman defending Earth from those who assimilated her.

Two decades later, SHIELD would be discovered to be a front for HYDRA and dissolved from the inside. Fury would end the events of those turbulent years more or less back where he started.

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter today! It's never exactly decided when Fury becomes Director, just that he's immediately after Pierce (if I'm remembering correctly), so now was as good time as any to make that official. I am very hopeful that Kevin Feige will receive my encrypted communications in time and inform me that in fact, all of this is canon.

Comments, suggestions, thoughts, we're probably past the halfway mark of this lil yarn so start guessing where it might go from here! I have a vague outline that keeps expanding. I wanna write about these bastards forever if I could, but after a certain point, we're gonna have to bid them adieu.

Captain Marvel may very well be my favorite MCU movie if I'm being honest, but that doesn't mean I don't really like a lot of the others!

- G
Something Wicked This Way Comes

Chapter Summary

The gang, minus the Rambeaus, hear a little more about this Xorrian artifact stolen by the Kree from the one and only Frigga, and get to know a little better the two of them that tried to kill Fury. Tir-Zar and Zyro are their names, and they're not going to be giving up anything without a little bit of convincing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For now, Fury, Carol, Talos, Soren and Frigga all sat in folding chairs around the room that served, unofficially and then officially, as his brand new office, with just a desk and chair and computer for Fury. It was very minimalist, it felt like him, and as much as he seemed to privately hate this assignment, Carol personally thought he was the best choice. Helped that he was her friend, too.

"This Aether, it's another Tesseract?" Fury asked.

"No, but it's similar, a similar composition, and it's been taken," Frigga said, "and so far only my husband and some of the select guard have found out, but if word reaches my sons, there will be hell to pay."

"Your sons," Carol noted, "seem quite strong. Might as well let them kill the Kree for us."

"I have a very personal and vested interest in keeping them both far away from that vile object," Frigga said, a little more strongly.

"And you need me to find it."

"Oh no, the trouble is not finding it," Frigga said, "I have tracked it already. I have a pretty good estimate of where it is already, and that's what worries me the most."

"What are you waiting for?" Carol said, "Send those two sons of yours. Send your husband."

"I cannot," Frigga said, "They absolutely cannot go for it, and I cannot explain to you why. I know we've only met once previously, and I was hoping to meet you again under happier circumstances, but I really cannot rely on my own people to rectify this. They're currently off on one of their many campaigns on Jotunheim trying to exterminate the Jotunn, it's been quite an active campaign that they will not wish to be interrupted from. Once they return, and if they discover the Aether is missing, it'll be much worse for them."

"That doesn't make any sense," Carol said, "this is far more dangerous than any Jotunn could possibly be."

"You're right," Frigga said, "but it cannot be helped. They cannot find out about this. It would not be good for this planet if they did and discovered its presence went straight here."

"So it's here? On C-53?"
"It was, briefly," Frigga said, "but it's gone off again, I know where the trail leads."

"Then let's go there."

"Not so simple," Frigga said with a sigh, "because whoever possesses it, I have to assume a Kree of some kind, is clearly letting me follow their tracks, letting the Aether be detected. And there's only one other I know who has encountered one of these and survived."

Everyone in the room turned to give Carol a sad look, and then it began to click a little bit. She was exhausted and despite the Kree blood she'd been able to absorb, she was still aching and bruised all over. The fight hadn't gone on for very long but she felt more exhausted than ever, as if she'd been running a marathon for weeks at a time with no sleep.

"You think this has to do with me." Carol said with a suspicious look.

"I think whoever did it has a bone to pick with you, my child," Frigga said. "I don't blame you for this. I do blame whoever is trying to enact some kind of personal agenda using a sacred relic we have to defend."

"It wasn't yours originally?" Fury asked.

"Nothing in Asgard was ours originally," Frigga said, "We stole it all, conquered it all, killed and maimed and then pretended as if everyone had joined willingly. Ours is a legacy of hate that we pretend isn't there. If the Kree do win, they take over your planet and the Skrulls and the Xandarians and whoever else, they will go down a similar road that we did. It's inevitable for conquerers to be taken out by their own bloat while those they have destroyed take back what was theirs. Birth and death, rebirth and so on."

"This is already not turning out how I wanted it," Carol said, "First they were able to record from inside the Kree suit, now they've got this, and we have no idea what they're doing--"

"They're setting a trap. For you. Personally." Frigga said gravely, "That's what I think this is all about. They're trying to force you to go somewhere that's advantageous for them, then gang up on you. They've clearly sent someone after you already to weaken you, prime you for the slaughter."

"Well whoever this was sent a whole platoon of these bozos after me," Fury said. "We've got the two ringleaders in custody."

"I wish to see them," Frigga said, and made her way out of the room before coughing expectantly, motioning at Fury to lead her to where these two supposed ringleaders might be found.

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Tir-Zar and Zyro were not eager to talk. Especially not when Carol entered the room, and they both did everything in their power to try and remove their restraints, to no avail. Especially considering she was flanked by two accursed Skrulls, those terrorists, those foul beings that had taken everything from the Kree. What they had taken was unclear, but they'd taken plenty since the Supreme Intelligence had said so and it had no reason to lie to them.

It was the Asgardian that got them to pipe down a little. Very few Kree had ever encountered one of those, but they were said to be very tough to kill and even tougher to assimilate, and this meant this was one of the few times your honor would not be counted against you if you were to flee them. It was simply a way to preserve your body so it could kill more enemies of the Kree.

"We will never tell you anything," Tir-Zar said flatly as soon as they stopped struggling against the
restraints.

"I see," Frigga said calmly, moving a chair so she could sit in front of them. "Well, it wouldn't hurt to expand on whatever I already know, like for instance, how I'm tracking your leader all the way from here to Zen-Whoberi."

The two of them stopped and stared at her. "Lies," said the less neurotic of the two, presumably Zyro.

"You don't just have to take my word for it," Frigga said, and rolled down her sleeve to reveal a device similar to the Kree datapad but seeming like it was made of liquid metal. The liquid pulsed and morphed into a crude map of the known galaxy, tracing with a path of liquid dust all the way from one tiny dot to another. Presumably it was the flight path of this Kree leader.

"Zen-Pram wouldn't leave us like this," Zyro said defiantly before piping up and his eyes going wide.

"Zen-Pram?" Carol said. "They've sent Zen-Pram after me?"

"Who's Zen-Pram?" Fury asked.

"Right nasty Kree, mate," Talos said, "Yon-Rogg is practically one of your Terran parasites in comparison to him. Feared combatant, highly influential in their movement. If he's involved, the Supreme Intelligence is taking this dead serious."

"It's come to this, then," Soren said, "I never thought it would ever do something like this."

"Zen-Pram is a noble leader," Tir-Zar said, "and you'll all pay for what you did."

"We've done plenty," Fury said, "but all's fair in love and war. You saw what we did to Yon-Rogg, right? We'll do worse to Zen-Pram."

They both began struggling against the restraints and trying to get out, as Carol said sadly, "I recognize them."

"You do?" Soren asked, hand going to her mouth.

"Yeah." Carol said, "Yon-Rogg trained lots of recruits. I'm almost certain I saw these two during those trainings. They'd assimilate a lot of Kree as children, you know. I never connected the dots then. Whenever a Kree commander shames his position, they send all of his recruits in the front lines to regain their honor or be killed. I'm sure these two are part of what's left of them."

"Yes, you would know that, Vers," spat out Tir-Zar, "you betrayed everything our people stand for."

"Yeah, I know," Carol said, feeling more sad about this than anything else. Two little boys trying to play at making threats when no one else in the room would be intimidated by them.

"Now let's not let this get away from us," Frigga said, "you did register as surprised when I mentioned where this Zen-Pram went, that he came here first, briefly, but clearly not the one Carol killed."

"Who's Carol?" Zyro asked.

"I am," said Carol.
"Besides, he wouldn't leave. You're tricking us. The plan was always to kill the Kree traitor and the Skrull scum right here, use this planet as our battleground, mobilize an entire fleet and take out every last primitive Terran."

"Clearly not," said Carol. "I had to kill one of your friends before. Spiky guy with the claws. He didn't last long."

"Roco-Bai? I never liked him," Tir-Zar said, causing Carol to smile and Zyro to yell "it doesn't matter if you didn't like him! He was helping us reclaim our honor!"

"Honor isn't worth it," Carol said. "And you've been betrayed."

"No we haven't!"

"Yes you have," said Frigga. "Even if you think I spent the massive amount of funds to fabricate all of this, don't you think they'd be coming back for you by now?"

The two grunts fell silent at this. Carol smiled even wider and said to them, "You know the point where they could've conceivably traveled between Hala and here went by quite some time ago. You're not fools. They wouldn't have hired you to kill me if they were fools."

"We're the best of the best," Tir-Zar tried to say, but stopped when Zyro delivered a mighty kick to the shins in response.

"Of course you are," Carol said, "You were trained by Yon-Rogg himself. We share a teacher, and I wouldn't be such a danger to the Supreme Intelligence had I been trained by a lesser commander."

"You brag a lot," Zyro said, and Carol internally felt like the biggest fool putting on airs like this, but she definitely couldn't express the terror that was really filling her mind at the moment. She had to stand there, hands on hips and look confident.

"I sure do. It's part of the VIP package," she said instead, stealing another phrase Maria liked to use, "And the VIP Package states that you've been had and you've been betrayed, and this is how I ended up leaving in the first place."

"We don't have to listen to you," Tir-Zar said.

"No you don't," Carol said sweetly, and held up her own wrist holding the Kree datapad and began clicking through it.

"What are you doing?" Zyro asked.

"You never learned the full functionality of this thing, did you?" Carol asked with mock sweetness. "I hardly have to beat the answers out of you when I can just take them instead." Those datapads, after all, could share information between each other through digital files, similar but more advanced to what the Terrans had in mind. She actually didn't know how much Zen-Pram would've shared with them, but it at least worked as an intimidation tool. She hardly expected them to be like her and want to leave willingly. But it would scare them, and maybe they'd let more things slip.

They began to struggle and yell and scream, as if any of the Terrans inside the complex would do anything than dare mess with the new Director of SHIELD personally interrogating extraterrestrials. Of course, the irony of the situation was that no physical harm was actually being delivered to either of them. They could only watch as first one and then the other's thera-fluid powered datapads switched on, and it began to flow from both of theirs to Carol's loading schematics, designs, hundreds of thousands of lines of Kree programming code in the same
language they spoke and wrote and read. Even Frigga, a veritable goddess, couldn't help but be a little impressed with this particular tech on display at the moment.

"I have all I need from them," said Carol dismissively, as she walked off back to Fury's office, not about to read all of this with the two of them whimpering and whining in her face. Plus, she thought it was high time she began fiddling with Fury's Terran computer to see if it could perhaps be upgraded to Kree levels. For all the disadvantages it provided, it also provided a much larger monitor with which to view secure information, and she sure as hell didn't want all of SHIELD to be able to see it.

Chapter End Notes

I've never enjoyed interrogation scenes in most forms of media so this got to be my opportunity to try and subvert that a little bit. Carol might be imbued with the power of the Tesseract, but she is no fool and she certainly enjoys any chance to show up anyone who might be doubting her. It's why we all love her so dearly!

As always, comments and suggestions go below, perhaps you might influence the story a little bit! The outline I'm working from is mostly done but still quite vague, so you never know.

- G
Take Takeout Tonight

Chapter Summary

The gang settles in to try and relax just a little bit and make some new discoveries in the world of Terran cuisine, but that's going to be interrupted shortly by the return of a couple familiar figures. Nothing ever settles down for these poor bastards, but they'll get their licks in while they can.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fury had ordered take-out through a secure location, and it was Frigga who went off to go and get it ("this is hardly my first trip to Earth this year, darling," was all she said), so they all enjoyed a helping of foods that Carol didn't quite recognize but knew she must've had before all of the things she'd been through. It was very lucky that so far, nothing seemed to be particularly toxic towards Talos and Soren, but they explained that Skrulls didn't poison easily. Fury and Frigga kept on using words like "tacos" and "burritos" and "fajitas" and it was all very exciting and quite tasty. She needed to try one of everything, and used the datapad to scan each item before she tried it so it could trace whether or not she was allergic to it. Fury angrily watched her as she shoved a taco containing something called "shrimp" inside of it into her mouth and groaning in joy.

"I'm allergic to shellfish, this is bullshit," the Director of SHIELD literally whined at her, causing the rest to chuckle.

"Deathly allergic?" Carol asked with shrimp and "tortilla" shoved inside her mouth.

"No, I just get a bad stomachache. Still bullshit though."

"I'm almost certain the Kree has some kind of elixir that can eliminate allergies, I'll grab some for you."

"Not soon enough," Fury said, and coped with this development by dipping a tortilla "chip" in some "salsa" and crunching on it.

Talos and Soren kept to themselves only because they were excitedly comparing flavors like they were still younglings themselves, feeding each other food and giggling. At least they didn't seem to be giggling in a way that indicated that they were mocking everyone else, but the other three couldn't help but look wistfully at them for different reasons. Fury because even though he had no desires of the flesh, that didn't mean he had none at all emotionally speaking. Frigga because the last time her husband had ever treated her like that was before that playwright whose plays bored high school children was born. Carol because the only person who might actually treat her like that was hundreds of miles away and likely worried sick about her.

So Carol responded to this by shoving a chip inside Fury's mouth at the same time he tried shoving one inside of hers and they both had to spit them out coughing into paper napkins and choking with laughter, as Talos and Soren blushed a darker shade of green than normal and Frigga laughed hysterically from her perch on the couch. Luckily, as Fury had explained, the room was soundproofed so there was no way in hell that anyone outside could hear grown adults acting so
much like children, but these adults (and one nearly immortal Norse goddess) really needed an excuse to feel like children.

Frigga, as the oldest by several centuries, settled quickly into the most maternal out of the entire group, with the arrangement of ages in this impromptu social gathering as follows from oldest to youngest: Frigga, Fury, Soren, Talos, Carol. Soren was ever-so-slightly older.

There wasn't a lot of conversation during these few hours, though Carol did tinker around with bits of wiring and tech from her datapad to be able to convert the info taken from their Kree captives into Fury's computer, gave it enough processing power by connecting it with her thera-fluid to be able to process the digital data of several planetary civilizations.

The issue was that Zen-Pram was not the type to be leaving precious info in the hands of those with the least seniority in this official Kree coalition he seemed to be building up. There was lots of generalized data, schematics on different sorts of tech, thera-fluid, the UNTN tech, what have you, but not very much on the specific mission itself other than vague entries listing the names of Kree individuals, and she only recognized one other name aside from Zen-Pram himself.

Devros.

She'd definitely heard of him. Only seen him a couple times. Never interacted with him. Her only really consistent memory of him was when he had interrupted a sparring session to playfully challenge Yon-Rogg and had beaten him so hard that if not for a hardy round of Xorrian elixir, Yon-Rogg would've likely died that day. He was only provided it because despite the beating, Devros had determined that he'd held his own in the ring and was quite skilled "for someone of his level." That one had trained Zen-Pram, who had trained Yon-Rogg, who had trained her, and it really seemed like each Kree commander had gotten more ineffective over time.

The cheerful mood of the room lessened as she told them more about this Devros, only Frigga not looking especially worried. There was no way Devros could possibly compete with her, but the issue was that Frigga likely wasn't going to be around whenever this one ended up showing up. Carol's frustration was apparent to everyone. No matter how much she seemed to improve, the obstacles facing her seemed to improve alongside with her so they were forever out of her reach.

En-Vad's name came up because she'd been Mar-Vell's mentor, though obviously when she had been Dr. Lawson, she had never once mentioned this person to her. That Mar-Vell's old mentor would turn on her too hurt a little bit more. Carol hadn't ever seen any of them other than Zen-Pram and Devros in person to begin with.

One name that she didn't recognize was strange to only the others in how Terran it sounded: Leigh Marshall. It was unusual for a Kree name but very ordinary for a Terran name, and Fury immediately went over to his newly upgraded computer and began fiddling around with it himself, clacking on keys and making hushed calls over that device called a "telephone."

"There's lots of Leigh Marshalls, this will take me some time," was all Fury would offer before he fell back into Professional Mode.

The rest went back to trying to scan and read as many of the documentations off the Kree captives' datapads as they could, beginning the arduous work of beginning to file them away. Everything was also being sent back to the Skrull outpost on Tarnax, where Khn'nr had been woken up from a deep sleep in order to start having whatever computer savvy Skrulls he had on him going over it on their end.

"How the hell did you manage this?" Khn'nr had asked in disbelief when Soren had rang him up on
her communicator with the announcement that they'd just found a stash of Kree data for the very first time. "Checking it for viruses, right?"

"Of course," Soren replied, as she was doing just that as Talos filed and Carol translated between the two dialects as best she possibly could, Frigga standing around helplessly as this was all out of her depth just a little bit. Conflict was the language she spoke and all of this subtlety, this "second war," as she described it, absolutely baffled her.

"We're going to scan it securely on our end just to double check, but so far this looks to be the real deal. I think this Zen-Pram fellow severely underestimated all of you." Khn'n'r said, allowing a little hint of weary victory to enter his tone.

"I'm not sure he has," Carol said absentmindedly, still using her own datapad's thera-fluid to translate. "I honestly don't think he cares that we know all of this, and I think he's willing to let the Supreme Intelligence die to get what he wants."

"Which is?" Khn'n'r asked with that distinctive arched brow of his.

"Me," Carol said, "I know exactly why he wants me."

"Revenge?"

"Not so simple," Carol said, "I knew there would be a retaliation for sending Yon-Rogg back to Hala in the first place, I know how Kree honor works, and it's almost like a form of social currency to us--them. It was all so fast and I didn't have many options in the moment, I just knew I needed to get him as far away from this planet as I possibly could."

"And so now this Zen-Pram's pride was wounded because his protege got taken out?" Fury asked.

"It's not just feelings, it's literal social standing. It's how you're perceived, what missions you're selected for, what kind of benefits you'll ultimately receive in society. His standing was already so high that not much changed, but the slight is still too much for someone as high up in their food chain as he is. Everyone working with him must've been affected by this."

"And I'm supposed to feel...sorry for them?"

"Not at all," Carol said, with a stern look at Fury. "But the more we understand them, the easier it'll be to kill them."

"We're going with murder already?" Frigga asked, a little shocked by that comment.

"Either we kill them or they stop at nothing till this whole planet is burned to ash," Carol said resolutely. "I don't like it, but their lives in exchange for billions? Not even up for debate. I'll only kill if I have to from now on and this is one of those times. I hardly think they're going to just surrender. Who knows how many Skrull and Xandarians they've collectively killed."

"And so," Frigga responded sweetly, with just a hint of edge in her voice, "we're going to presume this is the case for all of them? Those two you have in lockup over there hardly look out of their teens."

Carol sighed, because a little evil part of her wanted it to all end, and she was already regretting how brutal she'd been with Roco-Bai in the hangar all the way back in New York. It had felt like the Kree part of her had truly come back, but how was she just going to let herself off the hook for a heinous act, even if it had been committed against a heinous person?
She may have very well spent a while beating herself up about that if the door hadn't immediately opened and two somewhat familiar figures rushed in, and one of them unexpectedly got on her knees on the ground to hug Carol around the neck.

Behind Peggy Carter was Grant Buchanan, and to Carol's surprise, from her perch with her chin nestled comfortably in Peggy's shoulder for several long moments, he gave the slightest of polite nods in Frigga's direction, which Frigga returned. Her eyebrows arched in a way that would've made Fury proud if he'd spotted any of this, and Buchanan only responded by mouthing the word "later" and smiling very pleasantly at her in a way that made her feel very strangely seen.

"I'm ever so glad you're alright," Peggy said, leaning back but both her hands were still on Carol's shoulders, and she couldn't help but smile a little at the maternal attention she was receiving. "We came as soon as we heard."

She looked up at Fury, who nodded at her and Buchanan from his perch at his computer, and she said, "Director."

"Madam Carter. Agent Buchanan."

Strangely, Buchanan gave a strangely wide and strangely (proud?) smile in Fury's direction, which Fury returned with the eyebrow over his remaining eye arching in the way that everyone in Carol's life seemed to be an expert at by now.

"I'm very glad you were selected, Director Fury. You're going to make this organization proud."

"I am?" Fury asked, still quite unsure where Buchanan stood as far as seniority goes. He and Carol both resolved to discuss this between themselves the second they had some privacy with their own silent look.

Peggy flinched ever so slightly upon seeing Talos and Soren, who'd forgotten to disguise themselves, but once again, the seemingly unflappable Buchanan looked completely nonplussed by the whole thing. This is a particularly odd one, Carol reasoned, and reasoned that she'd get to the bottom of this one way or another.

"Well uh, surprise, mate." Talos smiled as friendly as a Skrull could towards a Terran they didn't know, though to Madam Carter's credit, she regained her composure incredibly quickly and reached out a hand to shake theirs. She almost visibly relaxed upon discovering their hands felt quite similar to her own.

"So you're aliens, I suppose?"

"To you, love, I reckon we are."

"You're just as alien to us," Soren said, smiling warmly at her.

"You were disguised as Keller and that other woman--"

"Romanoff," Buchanan added in helpfully.

"Indeed, Romanoff. That wasn't them who signed off on Director Fury."

"Well, love," Talos said, smiling wider, "I'd reckon I make for a much better Keller if you ask me. Besides, what harm has been done? Agent Buchanan over there seems wholeheartedly for him as Director."
Peggy turned to Fury, still typing away. "You're up for it?"

"I suppose," Fury said back, not looking at her.

Peggy shrugged. "I suppose we'll have to make do. I do not trust many in this organization these days."

"Miss Danvers?" Buchanan asked without warning, "May I see you privately for a minute?"

"Um," Carol said, "I suppose?"

She got up and followed Buchanan out of the room as he gestured towards a small conference room nearby. All she could hear was the clacking of Fury's fingers on the keyboard, Frigga, Soren and Peggy exchanging pleasantries, and Talos yelling after them, "You do anything, mate, and I'll rip out your entrails!"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay! Had a job interview this morning and computer trouble yesterday, so I've been kinda going at blistering pace to get everything done.

Comments, suggestions, what have you, all down below, please.

- G
Blathering with Buchanan

Chapter Summary

Carol has been asked to meet with Grant Buchanan, agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. and Peggy Carter's husband. Clearly the good madam and founder of the organization wants to get to know her a little better, though why she's so invested in having hubby do all the talking is a bit confusing. Either way, he seems a sympathetic sort, at least one that isn't going to be a source of trouble for her. Why he looks familiar is anyone's guess.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The two sat on opposite ends of the table. Both mirrored each other's gestures, hands clasped on the table in front of them, but Buchanan looked ever so much more relaxed. Carol noted to herself that his voice still sounded unusually like someone trying to disguise their voice as someone else's, so many inconsistencies, but she was too tired and stressed to think much about it.

"Before we begin," Buchanan said pleasantly, "I think you ought to call Miss Rambeau first." He pulled out a portable plastic device that looked similar to the telephone Fury had on his desk, dialed some numbers on it, and handed it to her.

"Don't worry," he said, "I don't plan on calling her myself unless it's an emergency."

She heard the ringing noise as the signals traveled hundreds of miles between Georgia and Louisiana, gulping and realizing how nervous she was to hear Maria's voice again. Just as she feared it may not go through, a click and suddenly the most beautiful voice she'd ever heard in her entire life said sleepily, "Hello?"

"Maria?"

She heard rustling and then a thump and then a "Fuck! Ow!" and then "I fell out of bed."

She turned away, holding her other hand over her free ear, and laughed and said, "I'd heal it right up, I promise."

"Goddammit Carol, where are you?"

"Atlanta, but I can't say any more clearly than that. I'm safe, I promise."

"OK, that will have to suffice. I'm very upset at you."

"Why?" Carol recoiled so much that the chair jerked back with a loud squeak, and Buchanan just kept on smiling at her and she was very nervous he could somehow hear their conversation and turned away again.

"Because you're not here, because I want to hold you, I want you to be close, because every time you're gone I spend every moment wishing I could be near you again."

Carol felt herself blushing and turned away even more even though she knew Buchanan could see
her. "Maria, I'm with people."

"See, that's the Carol I remember. You keep claiming you're not her but that, right there, when you get all flustered, that is exactly what you always do, so don't ever tell me again you're not the same person if you don't want to be."

"Everything alright over there?" Buchanan asked, sounding just a little too casual for his own good, Carol practically hearing the self-satisfied smirk in his tone and grimacing in response.

"I'm fine."

"Who's that?" Maria asked cheekily over the phone.

"Buchanan."

"Oh man, the SHIELD guy? Good luck with him, he seems painfully old-fashioned."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Keep me in mind next time you see me, OK love?"

What Carol hated most about Terran physiology is the inability to stop oneself from blushing when certain implications were made, but at the same time couldn't get enough of it as she felt her cheeks turning red again, "Maria, stop."

"Call me back soon, ok? I love you."

"Love you too."

And then Carol instinctually shoved the phone in front of her face, vaguely in Buchanan's direction, so he could reach out and grab it. Buchanan just kept on smiling, but not as meanly as she had originally imagined, and said, "You know, I still get like that with Peggy."

"You do?"

"Been with her a long time, since the war ended. Or at least, one of ours. Been with her since 1946."

"What about Rogers?"

A peculiar look crossed Buchanan's face, one approaching something close to surprise and fear, and then suddenly it vanished again to reveal his patiently smiling countenance once again, but he still let out an awkward cough and silently motioned to ask permission to sit down in the chair next to her. Carol nodded, squinting suspiciously as him.

"You heard about him and...her?"

"Yeah. She was the Woman in the Photograph and all that."

Buchanan let out an uncomfortable laugh. "Well, yes she was. I was already aware of that meeting her. I had a lot to compete with, so to speak, imagine having to compete with a legend, who was in reality nothing more than a man with a legend constructed around him."

"Maria is a legend, in her own way." Carol said without thinking.

"Oh, so the one who was with you last time? I'm good at reading people and you could not stop
stealing glances. Glad that ultimately worked itself out in your favor."

"That's not what I meant," Carol said, beginning to blush again.

"Carol," Buchanan said with some firmness, "I'm not judging. There's nothing to judge. And that's also not the point of this conversation so I apologize if I've been out of line at all."

"I figured she couldn't be SHIELD business."

"Not especially. I've read a couple files on her, but everyone who interacts with SHIELD gets one of those. Invasion of privacy, certainly, but it's only those who interact with them. But again, she's not a concern to me. As far as I'm concerned, it seems the best idea is to continue to let Director Fury contract her out for piloting work every so often and ensure her daughter gets a full education."

"I would agree with that."

"I figured, she sounds like a really bright kid. My bigger concern is what you're planning to do next."

"Why is that?"

"I have, shall we say, an interest in keeping you alive as long as possible, and what you're planning on doing isn't necessarily something that'll keep you that way."

"What for?"

"Well, on the one hand, you're an asset to the protection of this planet, even if you don't quite remember your time here."

"Surely I can't be the only thing in the way of this planet and total destruction."

Buchanan laughed heartily. "Not at all. Either way, you'd be greatly missed, especially with this whole Kree thing going on. I have to say, I don't know nearly as much about them as I'm hoping, sans what I've learned from Fury."

"What more is there to say? They want to assimilate all life into itself, they'd had me trapped for six years, they stole my autonomy and my agency and everything about myself, and I've got very little of it back now. I'm playing for keeps."

"Be advised," Buchanan said, the smile fading a bit, "to tread carefully in regards to them. You're very strong, but I can't help but worry if you're waging a one-woman war against an alien empire that had you under its clutches for quite some time. Don't let me have you interpret that as me doubting how capable you are: you're clearly very capable. But I don't want you doing this alone, and I wanted to offer any kind of help you might need. As you can tell," he coughed again, "this isn't exactly my forte."

Carol scrunched her nose up again, still giving him a suspicious look. She didn't feel unsafe around this Buchanan, he was just immensely confusing to consider, even as a Terran. Something was so off about him in some way. "Let me ask you something about yourself, Agent Buchanan, I hardly know anything about you."

"As long as you're not offended that I won't exactly be an open book."

Carol shrugged, and said, "Where were you born?"
"New York."

"Where in New York?"

"New York." Buchanan smiled even wider.

"I know New York is quite large and has multiple sections. Which section?"

"I'm not at liberty to say."

"You can't or you won't?" Carol asked, getting a little more annoyed.

"I can't, and if I could, I wouldn't," Buchanan said, not unkindly.

"What year were you born?"

"1918."

"Are you shitting me?" Carol yelled out without thinking, causing a couple of agents passing by on the outside to flinch, turn in her direction, eyes widen at the Kree suit, and then carry on.

"You're...much older than I expected."

"Do I not look elderly to you?" Buchanan asked, and while he certainly did look elderly enough, clear lines and wrinkles signaling advanced age, gray receding hair and a beard flecked with white, he just seemed a lot healthier than most Terrans his age. From what Carol understood, her unique circumstances would make it a while till she was affected like this, and Kree didn't really tend to age exactly in the same way, they lived for hundreds of years at least to be the most efficient soldiers they could.

"I guess. How did you meet Madam Carter?"

"I knew Madam Carter casually, during the war. We didn't get together until a year after it ended."

"How did you know her?"

"Worked with her. Was stationed under a Colonel Chester Phillips during the war, worked in the Strategic Scientific Reserve as one of his personal guard during that time. That was one of the precursors to what we now know as SHIELD, largely did a lot of the same stuff that SHIELD does except it was about killing Nazis."

"There still seems to be Nazis out there, Agent Buchanan."

"Well, yes. I much preferred those to the disaffected types we've got now who fantasize about times that never actually existed."

"So you were a bodyguard to a higher up. How'd you meet Colonel Phillips?"

"I thought this was about you, Miss Danvers."

"It is. I need to know who I'll be working with."

"Madam Carter doesn't get this kind of interrogation?"

"She will," Carol said sweetly, "but you happened to talk to me first."

"As long as you promise to interrogate her far more, she's the dangerous one out of the two of us."
"I've noticed," Carol said, "so about Colonel Phillips?"

"He's been dead for many years. He's not relevant to this story."

"He's relevant to you, and I imagine to Madam Carter, considering Chester Phillips is one of the founding members of SHIELD."

Buchanan blanched. "How did you know that?"

Carol shrugged. "It's on the mural when you enter the building."

"Right. I rarely enter from that side. I rarely go here."

"Atlanta seems pretty nice."

"I'm more of a New York man, myself, but thanks to your Kree buddy, not likely to go back anytime soon."

"What do you think of Fury as Director?"

Buchanan had to stop again and give her a curious look. "He's only just started."

"Sure, but he's an unexpected choice from what I've heard. Sure, he's the first Terran to have discovered extraterrestrial life, which is a lie, because the first to actually do it was me. But he did make the jump from agent to Deputy Chief, albeit of a minor branch, in a few short years, and now he's jumped to Director."

"I thought you were fond of Fury."

"I am fond of him. Very much so. But I worry that his connection to me is now putting him into a very vulnerable position, and let me just say that I'm not especially fond of Alexander Pierce and I worry that this is some way for him to get out of blame for all of this."

"Blame for what?"

"Not doing anything about the Kree. Not stopping the yahoos who knocked down two of your buildings last year. Any other number of things that he seems hesitant to deal with. I'll be honest: I don't much like him. And if Fury ends up getting dinged, I'm going to do some really nasty things to him."

Buchanan blinked for a few seconds, then burst out into hysterical laughter, pounding the table as hard as he could, while Carol blinked herself and wondered if perhaps her temper had caused her to say more than she should.

"Miss Danvers, SHIELD makes it a habit to make it impossible for anyone to spy on each other here. There's no cameras anywhere except for main hallways, no recording devices, I've personally helped to make sure of it. Sadly, I cannot let you injure Undersecretary Pierce, but I will say that he's being closely monitored."

"By who?"

"By me."

"What for?"

"Can't say. You've got nothing to fear, Miss Danvers. Director Fury will last a while here, that
much I can promise. I will make very sure that he remains as long as he wants to be here."

"And that's what you called me in for?"

"No, you keep going off topic. I just wanted to extend a word of warning and a word of friendship, that's all. I want you to feel as though you can trust me and Madam Carter, even if you can't trust most of SHIELD. I don't exactly blame you."

"I see."

"And because I want to gauge what you're like without anyone else around. There's a lot I can't really explain, but all I can say is that your instincts about Pierce are right and I'd avoid him if you can. Couple other names to remember to avoid: Jasper Sitwell and Brock Rumlow. You either encounter either of them, you stay far away. You could take them in a fight but they've got numbers."

Buchanan's voice had gotten very quiet and for the first time, he looked genuinely worried and concerned. Carol recognized Sitwell as the pompous ass that had made life so difficult for her in the New York facility, but Rumlow didn't ring any bells. How come the husband of the creator of this organization didn't even seem to like it there? Too many questions, but she made a mental note to grill him a little more intensely if this Kree business was ever successfully resolved.

"But Fury is fine," she finally said, a declaration rather than a question.

"Yes," Buchanan said, the easy smile returning. "Nicholas Fury is one of the very few people I think you can trust."

They sat silently for a few seconds regarding each other, Carol noting that it almost seemed as though Buchanan didn't seem to think he was as old as he was. He would keep on trying to move aggressively to stretch or spread out his legs and then have the mobility in his body catch him by surprise. Finally, he said:

"So about the Kree. They're run by this Supreme Intelligence, whatever that is."

"Artificial intelligence of some kind. Not so sure how it was made or where it comes from or how it got the idea in its head that all of life had to be assimilated into itself, but that's what it is. Big threat if I don't take care of it. Likely that they've tried to infiltrate this planet."

"Hmm. I have all these random names listed but they're not really described in any detail. Fury doesn't say much about it, it seems as though this whole mess has affected him a lot more than you. For as strong as you are, he seems very worried about you."

"Why is that?"

"I get the impression Fury isn't someone who opens up often. But somehow, you made an impression on him."

"He made an impression on me," Carol said quietly, smiling a little to herself. They both looked out to see that Fury stood by the entrance to his new office alone, looking at the both of them, suspiciously at Buchanan and then softly at her. They shared a very brief smile and then Frigga appeared next to him, put a friendly arm, gave a wave to Buchanan, and the two walked back inside.

"You've met Frigga before."
"Huh?" Buchanan turned around, surprised again.

"You've met her. You're both far too familiar with each other."

"You've got me again. Frigga is left alone quite a bit by her family, and in recent years she's taken quite an interest in this planet. Caught her trying to sneak inside the New York facility and she damn near killed me. I wouldn't say that we're friends but we're certainly on good enough terms, and she no longer sneaks around."

"Why would Frigga want to go to this planet?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Buchanan said, but sounding as though he knew the answer but wouldn't say. "Frigga has different concerns than her husbands or sons, they've got this several century long war with the Frost Giants or whoever they're currently engaged in and she couldn't care less about them. It angers them a bit, to think that their Queen is more concerned elsewhere. But they can't really stop her, she just travels and wanders a lot and keeps track of things, in her own way."

"You ever meet the kids?"

"Yes," Buchanan said, smiling strangely, and then the smile vanished. "I've met them. They've been here before. I never got to see Asgard, where she's from, but I know it exists and so does Madam Carter. Loki is a disgusting little zit, but his older brother...he's got potential."

"Maybe."

"Frigga told me about that, and how thoroughly you terrified him. He's very scared of you."

"Hmm," Carol said.

"It's funny," Buchanan said, seeming lost in thought about something, "out of all of them, I got to know you the least."

"Out of who?" Carol asked in response, but suddenly the alarms began to blare, red lights coming out of the ceilings, the two of them leaping from their seats and immediately following Fury, Frigga, Peggy and a disguised Talos and Soren, through numerous hallways, Peggy and Buchanan navigating for even Fury didn't quite have the layout down yet.

Chapter End Notes

I had specifically written down in my outline that at some point, Carol and Buchanan were going to have a sort of mock interrogation, so I was very excited to write this particular section. I think you can probably tell.

A lot has been going on! Have another interview on Friday! A lot going on! Please add any recipes you like down below, I'm looking for new things to cook. Recommend music or games or movies! Anything you want!

- G
A Cat Called Goose

Chapter Summary

Goose is no ordinary kitty, as you all well know. She's a flerken, a being of almost incomprehensible power, able to consume almost anything inside the pocket dimension that makes up her stomach. But in her many years Goose has grown to care for only a few. Now a threat emerges that only Goose has noticed, regarding one of the few people she likes to get pets and scritches from. Goose loves her scritches, and in order to make sure those remain intact, she's gonna have to do something about this herself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The source of the alarm was at the very front of the building, the closest to a proper entrance that it had, dozens of SHIELD agents with guns drawn, Peggy and Buchanan drawing their own and heading towards the figure that now stood alone, hands raised.

Carol's eyes widened before she even saw the figure, because it was yelling in the Kree tongue, hurriedly hitting its own theran-fluid datapad on the same arm that she kept hers, and its Kree armor was light gray and green, the old model, before she'd showed up.

One word rang a bell to a few of them: Vers.

Carol pushed her way as gently as she could to the front of the throng and stood in front of the Kree, seemingly a woman, hands on her hips, trying to look as aggressive and commanding as possible. The effect was slightly dampened by Goose, who had somehow followed them all the way there, hissing and rubbing against her leg.

The woman had been yelling in the Kree tongue, but it sounded incredibly slurred and it was incredibly tough for Carol to translate it even though she knew both languages. Upon seeing her, the figure rushed up to her, the agents and everyone gathered yelling out and closing in on them both with the guns, as she grabbed Carol by the shoulders and collapsed. Carol instinctively held her up, and they looked into each other's eyes, the former with concern and the latter with fear and exhaustion.

The Kree woman, previously a Xandarian by the looks of her, took a deep breath and began to speak in the Kree tongue again, but this time her words were perfectly understandable to Carol, Talos and Soren:

"My name is Una. I come from the planet of Hala. You are in grave danger, Vers."

Una slumped in a chair with an IV attached as SHIELD medics continued to check her vitals. She'd refused to go into a bed, and her Kree pod had been requisitioned and checked by SHIELD tech, and Fury had the entire Atlanta facility locked down. Carol's Kree suit had been taken off and Talos and Soren were in the corner of his office going over it with their own tech to make sure she
still wasn't traceable.

Even if this Una wasn't actually a threat, if she was able to track Carol here, than the rest of the Kree could too, and an army of them, more than likely led by either Zen-Pram or that sniveling ass Ronan, could be there at any second. Carol was awkwardly wearing a SHIELD sweatshirt and sweatpants that was (luckily) never used out of the numerous clothes Fury never wore. Barefoot, nothing underneath, she had never felt more cold, the damn Kree suit always had temperature control on top of everything else.

Frigga, for her part, sat alongside Una as she was practically sobbing and crying in her arms, not really out of any fear but because (Carol suspected), the jump points for the Kree pod had either been sabotaged or they malfunctioned on their own. It was a much older model of pod than Carol was used to, though for all her love of tinkering she wasn't entirely sure how even the modern pods operated. Talos and Soren had already promised to check Una's pod after Carol's suit. An improper jump point could induce a serious case of panic and terror on top of the physical effects, so for all anyone knew, Una may not even know she was crying uncontrollably.

She was beginning to calm down as Frigga muttered softly to her in a language that none of them understood, but it seemed to be getting the job done. Peggy and Buchanan were outside the office with Fury coordinating with the rest of the staff and making sure everyone had their assignments during lockdown without any complications. They kept deferring on Fury as to when to unlock the facility ("Not until that woman tells us everything" was all he kept saying), but otherwise nobody except the World Security Council could talk back to Peggy Goddamn Carter or her husband.

Carol held Goose, because she didn't know what else to do, but as soon as Goose had seen Una, she had begun to try and run away, and that was very much not like Goose. The flerken seemed incapable of fear, but Carol also wasn't sure why Goose suddenly wanted to leave so badly and it was clearly trying to communicate something as a Terran cat. Goose had stopped resisting, but she had kept throwing desperate looks at the doorway to Fury's office, almost like she was motioning with her head.

"What is it, Goose?" Carol asked. Goose had always liked Fury best (ironically, despite tearing out his eye), but she seemed to like anyone that she already knew, and now she was alternating between nuzzling Carol with her nose and nodding at the door.

"Why do you need to leave?"

Goose almost let out the cat equivalent of a sigh and just kept on nodding. Finally, she sprung free, causing Una to yell out, and rushed over to Fury's desk, and climbed on top of it. Carol walked over, looking at her, as she then proceeded to paw at a stapler and knock it repeatedly against a little plastic container of paper clips.

"Goose, we don't have time to play."

Goose let out the sighing noise, pawed at the paper clips now on the desk, and then reached her paw up in Carol's direction.

"Goose."

Goose sighed again, did it again, but her paw moved from Carol to Fury to Talos to Soren and back again. Then pushed the stapler against them, then repeated it all.

"Oh." Carol said.
"Are we the paper clips?" Carol asked without thinking.

Goose's head bobbed like a cat trying to nod. She had no idea what cats actually did but that might be a "yes"?

Finally, Goose leaped off the desk and went to each of them and nuzzled their legs. Upon getting to Fury, she nuzzled and then immediately took off scampering down the hallway, causing Fury to curse out loudly and send some guards after her.

But no dice. As Carol slumped into Fury's chair, feeling more exhausted than ever, Fury came back in, looking mortified.

"Goose is gone," he said sadly.

"She seemed like she had somewhere to be. I think she was trying to communicate with me."

"Cats can't communicate like that."

"Flerkens can."

Fury's hand went to his mouth and said, "What about the Tesseract?"

Carol smiled, reached with one hand to the floor without looking, and lifted it up, grimacing a little as it was still coated with flerken spit, oozing along all over it. "I think we're covered."

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Goose was very smart for a cat and very smart for a flerken, but she unfortunately still couldn't quite figure out how to get the two-legs to understand what she was trying to say. She genuinely didn't want to leave them. She didn't want to leave Glow Lady or One-Eye or those three Skrulls, she'd grown to love them very much. She loved the woman who Glow Lady always wanted to mate with and the child that wasn't Glow Lady's but Glow Lady treated as her own. Those seven individuals were the only ones that she, Goose of the flerkens, would love until there were other candidates. Six of the seven could probably take care of themselves, but one of the seven couldn't, and Goose had spent a lot of the chaos trying to look around herself to see how much of their strange devices she could understand.

Goose, being a flerken that looked like a cat (even she wasn't sure how that had happened), could not read two-leg tongues, she could understand feelings and intentions but not words and things they scratched down on things to understand. She had never actually seen another one of her kind in person, flerkens tended to be solitary creatures and didn't really need to socialize and they did tend to live for an insanely long time, though Goose had no way of knowing that. She knew she resembled a four-leg and acted a lot like one, but the tentacles and her ability to eat anything and as much as she wanted was not a four-leg trait.

What Goose could see were pictures, and Goose had spent some time trying to teach herself about the bad two-legs that had tried to hurt her friends, and not very much had come from that. She vaguely understood that the bad two-legs had turned good two-legs into them at some point, but that Glow Lady had gotten away from the bad ones and was now trying to kill them. Goose generally agreed with herself that bad two-legs no longer being around was a good thing, and plus they were very yummy to eat and the good two-legs liked it when she ate yummy bad two-legs, so eat them she shall!

Goose loved nothing more than eating. Loved it. Couldn't get enough of it. Never got any bigger though, because she could eat and eat and eat for hours and hours and never get bigger. She loved
that about herself. Sometimes One-Eye would bring her to places where bad two-legs were, but not
the same kind that hurt Glow Lady, and then she could eat them all! They were always bad two-
legs trying to hurt other two-legs for no reason, and she loved One-Eye the most for always
bringing her new food.

To speak plainly, there was a brief half an hour point where Fury was all alone with just Goose,
and Fury used something to be able to see the young two-legs that Goose loved so much, and that
young two-legs was with another two-legs, and even though this other one had tried really hard not
to look like bad two-legs, she could not fool Goose. Bad two-legs wouldn't be around unless she
wanted to hurt two-legs that was her friend, and she knew the rest of them had to take care of a lot
more at once. Goose really didn't want to leave them alone, it's a miracle any of them survived
without her help, but the young two-legs was alone. And scared. And vulnerable.

Chapter End Notes

I might write more about Goose separately from this, and a little too much reading of
the Warriors series as a kid has probably influenced this a bit too much. Goose in that
series would be devastating, she'd kill every one of them within a day, so a braver
writer than myself should make a go at that.

But yes, more Goose? Less Goose? I know she's called Chewie in the comics but I
honestly prefer Goose even if it's meant purely as a Top Gun reference.

- G
Plans Setting Into Motion

Chapter Summary

Once again, everyone's got a different strategy to take their upcoming opponents out. The stakes grow, and the people involved plan and plan some more and hope it works, because everyone involved just wants things to turn out for the best for them. Whether the plans only benefit themselves or others as well, that's the deciding factor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A couple days earlier, before Fury left Bogota to meet Carol in New York, maybe a few hours after Pierce had declared him the new Director of SHIELD with permission from the World Security Council, he needed to do anything to get his mind off of the insane amount of responsibility that had just been handed to him. Fury had somehow gotten the idea in his mind that Carol would not want to talk to him after all of this, that it had been his fault that she'd been locked in a facility herself for two weeks. This was, in hindsight, a ridiculous notion, for Carol had worried the same, and they both spent a lot of time worrying the other secretly disliked them.

Regardless, a call from Monica came in and Fury was already in as close to civvies as he'd ever be caught wearing, so he took the call, only to see Monica in her New Orleans dorm room.

"Hey Uncle Nick!" Monica had yelled out, looking far more excited than usual. Monica would never let her mother see this, but ordinarily she would look quite lonely and isolated, and that's because she wasn't alone. A girl around her age was with her too, and Fury smiled wide but inwardly wondered who the hell this was.

"This is my friend, Leigh! I wanted her to meet you!"

"You're uh, lucky that you caught me during a free moment, sweet pea!"

"It's so nice to meet you, Mister Uncle Nick," the girl called Leigh said sweetly, but were her eyes hazel or yellow? Fury was far too exhausted to say much or think much on it, he had to angle his "webcam" close so that they couldn't see the bruises and wounds on his chest and stomach.

"Nice to meet you too, Leigh," Fury said as friendly as he could, "hope classes aren't being too difficult."

"No way," said Monica, "Leigh is so good at algebra and she's been helping me!"

And so on and so forth, nothing but pleasantries and someone posing as Maria's brother by marriage (pretending that he was related to her ex-husband, Frank, causing Fury to be incorrectly referenced to as "Nicholas Rambeau"), but if he'd been less exhausted and more observant, he would've noticed that the second Leigh Marshall appeared on the screen, Goose had gone dead silent and said nothing. If Monica hadn't been so excited to see both of them, she would've noticed that Goose never got this still and quiet, she was always meowing and up to some kind of mischief, but she acted like she was a porcelain doll, staring Leigh down. For Leigh's part, she didn't notice anything but the strangely quiet and polite cat next to Uncle Nick, who she knew as Nick Fury. She
had never been told what a flerken was, she had no reason to worry about what centuries of exposure had told her was just an ordinary feline.

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Goose wasn't very precise about this, but ever since she'd been in New Orleans and been in Monica's dorm room, she'd memorized the scent of the building, she'd memorized the direction, she had a list of places she liked and that contained people she liked and this was one of them, and so the moment she had slipped outside the Atlanta facility, her instincts as a flerken kicked in and she began to race as fast as she could westward, tracking the movement of buses and trains to leap onto them to catch a break.

She trekked for quite a while. She kept going, knowing the others must be worrying. She'd sworn the bad two-legs as her enemies and aside from Glow Lady, each and every last one of them would be in her belly soon enough.

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Zen-Pram and Devros stood at the bridge of the ship. They had since discovered that the Supreme Intelligence had assigned them Yon-Rogg's old ship during his command of Starforce, the Helion. Even the possessions of a shamed Kree had its honor stripped of it, and the possession, too, would have to regain it through a suitably noble set of deeds. No matter, it had suffered no damage and worked quite well for what they were needing. They had no intention in engaging in direct conflict until the most necessary moment.

Wasting such resources on a single Terran would have to be justified, that was what they eventually came up with. Kree were never paid for their work, but they were afforded privileges, yet neither of them particularly wanted or needed them. En-Vad and Phae-Dor would be content to be able to get more for the Science Council and they'd definitely get it, Kleaner was never designed to have the mental capability to want or need anything. But three of their number could turn out to be problems and so the two of them had decided to do something about them.

Leigh Marshall quickly showed that her time away from the Supreme Intelligence had made her far too self-motivated, and she wanted the kind of glory and recognition that no Kree should openly ask for. To make such demands as she did was against everything they could stand for, and the two former recruits of Yon-Rogg, Tir-Zar and Zyro, had quickly begun to assert themselves towards the rest of the Kree before leaving and acted like they owned the place. Such self-motivation could not continue, their dishonor would lower their honor as well even if it went well. They could not be openly killed, as none had committed a crime so heinous to let that happen, but the two of them had been on enough missions to understand what happens when the herd isn't properly thinned out of its sickest members.

Thus Leigh Marshall had been very surprised to discover that after Monica had left them while he'd been briefly on C-53, Zen-Pram had agreed to every single demand that she made. The more she demanded, the more he promised. He then told her that her assignment was to lure in the Terran traitor with the power of the energy core and kill her. Leigh Marshall had eagerly agreed, her first chance in centuries for pure combat, failing to see that no matter what happened, Zen-Pram got his way. Either Leigh Marshall would actually kill Vers herself and still be stranded, as her communication had already been severed, or Vers would kill her and she'd be taking care of someone that they needed killed anyway. She'd outlived her purpose, the last true threat of the planet wouldn't be there much longer.

As for Tir-Zar and Zyro, they made an excellent diversion for the other Terrans and were more than able to hold up their own, and Zen-Pram hadn't been surprised to discover that they'd been


captured. They seemed weak-minded enough that the right pressure might even turn them against him. He could live with that, another necessary sacrifice. No matter what happened, Vers would be in almost constant fighting with very little time to rest, the energy of the Tesseract would cushion the blow but she would still be exhausted, less capable, less ready for when the true blow struck.

Vers' weakest quality, as they'd figured out quickly, was a sentimental streak, the greatest of all weaknesses. Certainly, they could threaten the Terran she had previously seemed to be involved with and her youngling, they could threaten that other Terran she seemed to regard as a friend that had helped kill Yon-Rogg, even that disgusting Skrull family that seemed to follow her around. They could do all of that, but to threaten so few would also give her a greater chance to rescue them. No, they needed to exploit that sentimental streak, that love of the weak and the defenseless and those who were not worthy of the gift of life, to the point where she could see how foolish such a weakness was before they stripped the life from her body and have their honor restored in one fell swoop.

Zen-Pram had one more surprise planned for Vers, that was the one he was really looking forward to, a sadistic streak existed in him that he had always been in denial about. The best plans were always those that could be known by your enemy and have the result still be the same, no matter what you do.

That was, of course, the other use in having Tir-Zar and Zyro be captured. Whatever went through his datapad would go through theirs, and he really did want the Terrans to end up seeing what he would telegraph next.

Then he made his way to a new addition to the ship that had been added since those two rookies had left them, a strange pod of sorts, with only a single Kree glyph carved onto it as a means of identification. As an early assimilated Kree, the Supreme Intelligence had done all sorts of modifications to existing life to see if it could find its ideal soldiers before settling on assimilation, Leigh Marshall being one of the models to see how long a being could live without disintegrating. This one had been long forgotten, but En-Vad and Phae-Dor had done some digging and discovered it, and considering who Vers kept as company these days, perhaps she needed a nasty reminder of exactly why she shouldn't be keeping that company in the first place.

The inscription read **RUUL**, and Zen-Pram smiled wide.

To use a Terran expression, two birds with one stone.

Later that night, cots had been personally dragged in by everyone except for Carol, who had fallen asleep at Fury's desk, head slumped over onto his computer keyboard. They'd all forgotten before this point just how little sleep Carol had been able to get, so they all went to grab cots and put them down (save Frigga, who was leaving). Frigga, for her part, helped to set them and some blankets down, softly carry Carol to place her onto one of them, and hand Fury and Talos and Soren a coin each, with a strange inscription on it, and speaking into it could get them to contact her directly. Then she teleported out of the room across time and space using the Rainbow Bridge, Carol barely stirring at all the noise and commotion. Somehow, nobody else in the building was able to see it.

Peggy and Buchanan had already left, both looking very worried in Carol's direction before they went, and handing Fury their personal numbers now that he'd risen to the rank of Director. This would be a big deal for a lot of people, but not really for Fury, though Carol had mumbled something about how Buchanan was going to vouch for him and he couldn't help but wonder why. They'd never really interacted before the briefing at the Triskelion, what would such a bigwig want to do with him?
And so the four remaining members, the whole gang minus Maria and Monica and the Daughter (who checked in from Tarnax briefly to say hello and to silently cast a psionic spell of some kind remotely to give Carol a peaceful sleep), tried to go to sleep and only Fury failed.

It was his second night as Director of SHIELD.

He did call Maria first, to confirm that Carol was with him, and despite how run down and sleepy she was, that she was more or less as healthy as she would be. Carol hadn't gotten sick once so he had to assume the Tesseract had handed off some sort of disease immunity on top of literally everything else. They didn't talk for too long, Maria was overworked, too many clients, too many rich assholes needing their private planes for maintenance and not paying her enough. Add in stress for Carol on top of that, stress for her daughter and hoping she was making enough friends. Maria too accidentally expressed a fear that perhaps Carol didn't like her as much as she liked her, and Fury had to laugh because no potential couple was more terrified that the other didn't like them as much as this potential couple. He had to stop and think because they'd both had extraordinarily hard lives, and he had too. Fury was older but not necessarily wiser. With how much Carol talked about Maria whenever no one else was around, he had to suspect that the two were competing to see who could like the other the most.

Once Maria hung up to go to bed, Fury began reading through files again. He was blessed with the ability to not have to sleep all that often and maintain some kind of health in the process. He was probably an insomniac but he never bothered doing anything about it. Fury moved through life in the stoic way he always did. So he checked files, briefly flinching when he realized that he'd accidentally recorded Monica and her new friend Leigh while video-chatting with them.

Fury made two mistakes and then quickly realized them. The first was clicking back on the file and having the only confirmed picture of Yon-Rogg, from footage from Talos' ship they were able to transfer, appear on the other side of the screen, and making the observation that Yon-Rogg and Leigh's eyes looked identical.

The other was hearing a loud high pitched whine from the room that Tir-Zar and Zyro were restrained in and realizing he'd completely forgotten about them. He cursed and ran into the room, the whine distinctly digital, the two restrained Kree screaming in pain as he began to fiddle with both their datapads. Finally, he hit the right button (somehow) and they both switched off, only to be replaced by the sound of a deep voice, garbled initially but translated into English with the datapad's universal translator.

"This is Zen-Pram. We have received our next target. Should you hear this message, your presence is requested on Zen-Whoberi at once, we will find a fresh wave of recruits for assimilation. I repeat, Zen-Whoberi is our next target. We have been contracted and will be greatly rewarded by an outside party allying itself with our beloved Supreme Intelligence. Zen-Pram out."

The two restrained Kree looked down at their datapads, then at Fury, then at the door with a lot more fear.

He spun around to see Carol, still in sweatpants and sweatshirt, leaning against the doorframe, still clearly exhausted but glaring angrily at the both of them as they literally shivered under her gaze.

"Carol--"

"That's the play, isn't it? Draw me in, kill an entire planet's population just to get to me?"

"We didn't know! He said he'd be coming here next!" Zyro squealed, looking like he was about to
"No offense, traitor, but I doubt he's going there just for your sake," Tir-Zar, the calmer of the two, said defiantly.

“What do you mean?”

“You were one of us once. You went on plenty of raids to planets to assimilate. They don't happen as often because we have so many in our ranks now, but I suppose the Supreme Intelligence is running low on recruits.”

“What the hell is he talking about?” Fury asked.

“Are you sure we can be sharing that?” Zyro asked Tir-Zar.

“It's not confidential information,” Tir-Zar spat back in response, and the two began to awkwardly try to hit each other despite the restraints until Carol and Fury ran in to release them both and then physically hold them apart from each other.

“Your dearly disloyal boss mentioned something about an outside party?” Fury said, holding onto Tir-Zar while Carol held Zyro in a chokehold so aggressive that he was struggling to breathe.

“We don't know anything about no outside party! Kree don't get hired out as contractors! We do it for ourselves!” Zyro screamed out, pushing against Carol's arms but being too tired and worn out to do so.

“That's not like the Supreme Intelligence,” Carol said, "they never deal with outsiders."

“Either the Supreme Intelligence doesn't know, or it's trying to draw you there.”

“It's not concerned with me. I'm not strong enough on my own to destroy it. I'd need a fleet and a lot more tech and there's no other group in the known galaxy that would be willing to lend that to me. I have everything but funds.”

“You cannot destroy the Supreme Intelligence,” Tir-Zar stated, a sneer practically taking over his face, "it is invincible."

“Clearly not if it's hiring interns,” Fury said with a snicker and even the very exhausted Carol smiled at that one, and then proceeded to slip and let go of Zyro to fall to the floor, struggling to pull herself to her feet.

“When's the last time you slept?” Fury asked, noting that Zyro did not try to run.

Zyro looked at Carol and to Fury and said, "Where am I supposed to go? They're not going to come and get me."

Fury shrugged and let go of Tir-Zar, who slumped to a heap on the nearest wall, sighing in relief. Carol kept on trying to pull herself to her feet, but couldn't, and Fury had to note that the wounds inflicted by that crazed Kree bastard in the New York hangar hadn't entirely healed and whatever he'd used on her hadn't entirely worn off. Fury, Tir-Zar and even Zyro suddenly found themselves all moving at once to help her off the floor and to a seated position against the other wall.

“Why are you helping?” Fury asked them.

“She gains nothing by killing us, and we're not going to gain anything by killing her.” Zyro said.
"Even though she's trying to kill your Supreme Intelligence."

"She won't," said Tir-Zar, still with a sneer in his tone, "but there's no point being uncivil when you could easily have us killed."

Fury shrugged again and moved closer to Carol, taking her face in his hands and looking at her.

"I think that's part of the plan, Carol. Wear you out to the point where not even those powers of yours can help you. Make you so exhausted and so wounded that you won't be able to fight back so they can get you on a level playing field. You have to sleep."

The two Kree wandered over to Fury's computer and looked at the screen. "She won't have time to sleep."

"What do you mean?"

They pointed at Leigh. "In the interest of you not killing us, we'll tell you something about her."

Carol pulled herself to her feet and wandered over next to them, stared briefly at Leigh, and said "Goddammit."

"She's one of them?"

"Yes. Shit shit shit shit!" And with that, Carol spun and punched into the wall as hard as she possibly could. She tore through the softer part and then collided with the metal behind, bending it and yelling out in pain. Fury ran after her as she tried to hit it again, and was able to grab her just as she hit it again, the two Kree throwing themselves backwards, yelping out again. They were quite cowardly sorts, Fury noted as he tried to keep her from hitting the wall again, Talos and Soren springing up to help. She was able to hit it one more time, the photon energy shielding her hands somewhat, leaving bruises instead of broken fingers.

Carol could easily kill all three of them, and all of them knew it, but she still made a show of trying to struggle free without hurting any of them badly before all four fell backwards to the floor, as she quietly began to sob.

"Was it something I said?" Talos asked jokingly before getting an annoyed nudge from his wife and piping down.

"Excuse me," another voice said, and all of them from the floor turned to see Una, still seated in the same chair and still sporting the old model of Kree suit, and it seems that they'd hadn't just forgotten about their captives.

They had kept on insisting that Carol should sleep, but she kept on refusing, and she'd nod off for a few minutes against Soren's shoulder, who was whispering quietly into her ear. Whatever it was, it seemed to be calming her down a little bit.

Una was still too weak to stand, but they'd moved her into a far more comfortable seat and she was now hurriedly talking to Talos in the Kree tongue, her universal translator still not quite working. Tir-Zar and Zyro slept in two additional cots, too exhausted to know that Fury's remaining eye did not leave them at any point. Soren had now called the Daughter and they were both murmuring into Carol's ear in the Skrull tongue and the more they talked, the deeper she seemed to sleep.

"It won't be enough," Soren said, "we'll need hours of this to make up for all the sleep she's lost.
Hopefully it'll be something."

Fury squeezed her hand as thanks in response, but he wasn't really sure what else to do. He'd only been Director for two days and not one bit of the considerable resources he now had access to could stop this Zen-Pram bastard. He hadn't even been checking on things to deal with here on his home planet. He suspected that Peggy and Buchanan might be secretly taking up the slack for him, as he'd just gotten a handwritten note from her that simply said, "When I was Director, we didn't have to deal with aliens. Chin up."

Fury had first checked in with Monica and luckily she still seemed alright, though Leigh was no longer there. He was worried that if he told her that Monica might try to start a fight, and according to his captives, Leigh Marshall was a particularly vicious one according to the records Zen-Pram had let them read. Clearly this Kree didn't care if they knew who she was, which was far more concerning. If they didn't care that he knew this, what were they trying to hide? All Fury could do was ask her to let him know more about her new friend because he was really excited to get to know her college friends, and Monica eagerly promised to tell him everything once she learned more about Leigh.

"I'm not sure I can come along for this one," he told Soren.

"We'll take care of this one," Soren said, eyes narrowing, "She's not going to try anything until either Zen-Pram tells her or she knows that she's been compromised. We've got maybe a window of several hours to eliminate her and then try to intercept them at this planet that they're going to massacre."

"How do we know it hasn't already started?"

"It'll come through the datapad once it's started, and if they want Carol there, there's no point to go through with it and then alert them. They know that we know, everyone knows that the other knows, and we're just getting ready to fight them."

"Do you think there's a chance of saving the planet?"

"No," Soren said forcefully, and Fury blanched. "Even if the entire Skrull army came through in time, we don't have the numbers to compete with the billions they're likely to send. Honestly, the best thing to do would be nothing. But I don't know how to convince Carol to stay away from them."

"You'd just let billions of innocents die?"

"If I had a choice, no one would die. You have to be pragmatic in war, Fury."

She said nothing more, only got up to leave the room, shifting her disguise to Peggy Carter, softly shifting Carol against the wall. She began to softly moan in what sounded like pain, and Fury scooted closer to her.

"Fury," Carol said very quietly, sounding a little less exhausted than before.

"What's up, ace?" Fury asked, using her old Terran callsign. Carol smiled very softly, eyes barely open, and reached out for him. He moved next to her against the wall and she leaned her head against his shoulder, wrapping her arms around him, and he reciprocated, feeling more small and alone than ever before.

"We have to help Monica," Carol said softly.
"I just checked up on her, she's safe. Talos and Soren are gonna help you take care of that Kree in the morning."

"Have to right now."

"No," Fury said softly, "you need to sleep. This is their plan. They're trying to wear you out and we can't have that."

"I don't care if they wear me out," Carol said, slurring her words slightly.

"I know you don't care about yourself," Fury said, "but I do. So you're sleeping."

"I don't like myself," Carol said.

"Why is that?"

"I keep fucking everything up. Everywhere I go, people die. I'm not fast enough."

Fury sighed, and didn't answer. He didn't have a very good answer for something he thought about himself, too. He suspected that everyone in the room except the newcomers thought that about themselves to some degree.

"Sleep, Carol," was all he could finally say, wincing as tears flowed and stung his bad eye. Soren re-entered the room and saw them and sat down on Carol's other side. Talos and Una were still talking, and he gave a very loving look at his wife before turning back to her.

"How do you get someone to love you for that long?" Carol said to Soren.

"We've been through everything together," Soren said, "so many hardships, so much pain, we've been hurt in every way that a person can be hurt, and when two people go through that together, often they connect over that. He knows my pain and I know his. But Skrulls don't worry about that like you Terrans do. We have our mind melds, we can sense each other's feelings and intentions even if we can't properly read each other's minds. I know that the moment he's tired of me, I'll know for sure. It gives me comfort and gives him comfort."

"I'd trade the Tesseract to do that." Carol mumbled and the other two began to laugh softly.

"You don't have to," Soren said, and she motioned for Fury to let go and he did so. She softly pressed her forehead against Carol's and for a few seconds nothing happened, and suddenly Carol's hands went to her mouth and began to hyperventilate a little, and Fury flinched, but Soren held up a finger.

Carol saw, in that eternal moment, that at some point Maria had raised the same concerns, and Soren had done with her what she was doing with Carol now, and despite how little either of them could believe that another person could care about them that deeply, saw how badly Maria definitively cared and how badly she wanted Carol to care about her in return.

Soren moved away, smiling, and Carol smiled too, still very sleepy and a lot calmer.

"That should answer some of your questions," Soren said, very satisfied with the result, and leaned back against the wall.

"What did you do?" Fury asked.

"She was really hoping an answer to her biggest question since getting herself back was 'yes,' and it
turned out to be 'hell yes.'" Soren said with a growing smile on her face.

Carol, still very sleepy, grabbed one of Fury's hands in one hand and one of Soren's in the other, whispered "I love you both so much," and then immediately passed out again. The other two fell asleep several seconds later. The connection with Soren created a small mind meld for all three, and all three, for a few blissful hours, felt very safe, and it would be these few hours all three would draw on later on when they didn't feel nearly as safe. Even as the errant thought from Fury closed the door on their consciousnesses shutting off, on how silly and sentimental all this was and how a hardened intelligence agency director shouldn't be feeling like this, he had to at least privately admit to himself (and Carol and Soren) that he liked having them around.

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Talos looked at the three of them sleeping and smiled, and Una noticed.

"Family?" She asked in the Kree tongue.

"That one," he said back, motioning with his shoulder at Soren, "is my wife."

"She's lovely."

"That she is, mate."

"The other two?"

"Not related by blood, related by something else. We spent a little while trying to kill each other but I'm glad we stopped."

"How come?"

"She was a Kree, I was a Skrull. She's not a Kree any longer."

"Will I stop being Kree?"

"Only if you want to, mate. I'm not here to decide anything for you. But I want everyone to decide for themselves."

"I knew they lied to me, as soon as I heard Mar-Vell had betrayed them. I knew and kept it to myself."

"Mar-Vell was a very dedicated and very distracted person. Once she put her mind to something, nothing else entered."

"I wish things could've worked out between us. Did she ever speak of me?"

"She did. Quite often, in fact. But she decided the mission came first. Nothing else mattered."

"I just want to be good. I can't live with this anymore."

"Goodness isn't a personality trait. Goodness is a choice."

"And do you think you're good?"

Talos shrugged. "I want to be good, mate. I want to protect my people. I want to protect my family and my chosen family," nodding in the direction of Carol and Fury.
"Would you die for them?"

"Without hesitation."

"Perhaps one day I will know people I would die for."

"It takes time, mate. Rest and recover. You're doing a very good thing, doing this. You're well on your way."

Chapter End Notes

If this is something you want more of, let me know, but I wanted to briefly check in with every faction and see what they're up to so that way you're not waiting multiple chapters to get there. If you prefer focusing purely on one group for a while, I can do that too, the outline allows for it!

Had another interview today, that was very stressful, so I had a bit more time to write today! This job is exactly what I've wanted for a while! Hope it works out! Send happy thoughts, please!

We're also at 30 chapters! I haven't really been acknowledging that and I've been on autopilot, but at least we have gotten that far together!

- G
"Sorry, Mon-Mon."

Chapter Summary

Carol and company head to New Orleans to intercept the Kree spy in their midst. The infamous flerken-in-kitty-form Goose does the same. Everyone is converging, everyone is out to protect the youngest member of the team, but perhaps such defense was never needed in the first place.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The plan: apprehend or kill the Kree operative known as Leigh Marshall without drawing undue attention to oneself or alerting Maria Rambeau as to why all of them but Fury were suddenly headed back to New Orleans.

After that: they'd have to navigate their way to the distant planet Zen-Whoberi as fast as possible, despite knowing that their enemies had very likely set up some sort of trap for them. Figure out whoever this outside party was supposed to be. Take on an entire Kree army almost entirely by their lonesome. The odds were insurmountable, and Carol in particular couldn't help but secretly wish that there were other people like her out there so she wouldn't have to keep on doing this on her own. It was so fucking exhausting, knowing that you had to do something about all of this. What a thankless role she found herself in.

The flight out of Atlanta was a sad one, though Carol got the strange feeling that she may not see Fury again for a little while, the same sort of strange feeling she'd gotten way back in 1995. Now, early 2002 coming and settling itself in, having barely lived a year in physical time in between these two points, she had never felt more disconnected, going off of pure autopilot. The care and love and affection she felt for the Rambeaus and Talos' little cluster was the only motivation she was capable of now.

The question of who Carol Danvers had been no longer mattered quite as much to her, and could it in turbulent times such as these? That was a luxury reserved for the person who had only been a Terran and not an unholy mixture of Kree.

She had way too much time to think as the flight from Atlanta to New Orleans commenced, Talos and Soren at the cockpit, only the three of them now as their informal little group had dwindled down, and as much as she loved and cared for them, the only safe thing left to do would be to find some way to try and abandon them before Zen-Whoberi. Soren had already made the suggestion to not take the bait, that everyone involved knew it was a suicide mission, but that little angry part of her that felt like it had remained no matter what the Supreme Intelligence had done to her kept telling her that even if she could do a little bit more to soothe the guilt and anger that flowed through every molecule of her being, she had to do something.

She was not remotely afraid of death as a concept, but she was afraid of never seeing any of them again, and ironically this meant she never had to see any of them again so they could be all be safe, finally safe, safe from her--

"I know what you're thinking, mate."
Carol blinked from her seat behind the cockpit to see both Talos and Soren staring at her intently, the Skrull ship had been set to autopilot and now they stared, patient and unblinking.

"You need to stop trying to be so noble, love."

"About?"

"You've got a sentimental streak in you."

"So what if I do?"

"Just because you want to do your part doesn't mean anyone else is being punished being around you," Soren said patiently, the gaze not moving, making Carol feel as though she was being scanned internally.

"I don't want anyone else to get hurt."

"Getting hurt is part of life, mate," Talos said. "Who's to say the second we arrive back on Tarnax that a giant rock falls on our heads? You keep making the assumption you have control over any of this. First lesson we had to learn as a resistance and a resurgence is that everything we were doing might be futile, that we all might die anyway."

"And?"

"Die anyway," Soren said, "because obviously I can't talk you out of it. So the Daughter is meeting us in New Orleans and the three of us are going with you, and I'm sure you'll tell us not to tell the Rambeaus."

"Nothing is happening to them under my watch. You go off and be suicidal if you want, but I am not dragging them into this, there is no way either of them will last a second--"

"Maria's one of three Terrans to kill Kree and Monica's got the same powers as you. They'll be fine. I can't control what you choose to do, but I know the Rambeaus well enough to know that once they find out about how you're going to intentionally spring this trap, whether it started out for you or not, they will insist on going along. They would rather die with you than live separately."

"Soren, please. You couldn't possibly decide to bring your child with you--"

"I didn't. I told her to stay away. She said she's going. If she dies and I live, I will mourn her with every fiber of my being, just like I will mourn every single one of you. But I will mourn knowing she went out in spite of her fear. Give the Rambeaus that kind of chance, I know it sounds strange to you but if you hide this from them and go on without them and get yourself killed, they won't forgive you."

Carol sighed quietly. "I'm tired of making things worse for people."

Soren smiled. "I wish I didn't feel that way myself. Part of sentience is regret."

They said nothing else for the rest of the journey. Carol didn't feel especially heroic, she didn't feel good about others having to reassure her, that for all her strength she still felt weak, and that the rest of the people she loved felt exactly the same way, if not worse.

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As for Monica Rambeau, she had no idea her Auntie Carol and the closest to godparents that she
had were now headed straight her way, but she had her own insecurities to worry about. Imbibed with the power of the Tesseract, sure, but still a college student and someone who had been a little too sheltered and isolated as a kid. This wasn't entirely Maria's fault, she'd actually been somewhat lax as a mother since Monica had never been a particularly difficult child to raise. She had been self-sufficient from an early age, much like her mother and Auntie Carol had been as kids. She was the rare one who tended to really like her parents, even Frank, though the two only talked a couple times a year. Frank paid his alimony on time and still talked to Maria on occasion, and made efforts to include both of them in his new life with his new partner. She couldn't ask for more.

Though she had Leigh as a friend, Leigh was also far more extroverted than she was, and tended to go to parties a bit more. Monica never tried to stop her, she tended to do well enough in her room, and Fury had even paid so she'd have a private dorm all to herself after the whole Yon-Rogg debacle (thoughts of him still made her cringe for a few reasons, least of all the whole "killing him defending Uncle Nick" thing, and at least she hadn't killed him in cold blood?).

All of the luxuries Monica enjoyed was because of Uncle Nick and not because of her mother. She compensated for this by only eating three meals a day and not getting herself anything aside from books on trips to the school library or the rare VHS tape. She wasn't about to waste any more of Uncle Nick's money than she had to, especially because Uncle Nick never asked anything of her in return. Monica knew that he'd grown up working class as well in Alabama, that he too was a very frugal person, that she was probably the largest expense he actually had in his finances, and she still wanted to make him proud as much as she wanted to make her mom and Auntie Carol proud of her as well. Not to mention the Kree suit she kept hidden in between her mattress and the bed frame, which she really wanted to use again but couldn't until an opportunity presented itself.

And because she needed to get fit like her Auntie Carol was, she'd taken to spending a lot of time in the gym, reading up on books about fitness from the library, and it was some amusement to her classmates that the somewhat bookish and quiet girl who was awful at algebra but excellent at everything else spent so much time exercising. Monica was already in good shape for her age, but she needed to get stronger, and the photon energy coursing through her certainly helped with this, it needed to be excised and physical exertion seemed to be the way to go about it. She'd spend some time flying when she knew she wouldn't be caught, practicing photon blasts in the closest forest, really going out of her way to be ready the second Auntie Carol needed her.

As for Leigh, she always wondered why that damn Rambeau kid kept on wandering off on her own so often.

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A lot of events began to happen at the same time.

- En-Vad and Phae-Dor set off the strange capsule from the Helion, on a collision course with the planet C-53, conveniently using Leigh Marshall's genetic code as the marker it would be drawn to. Zen-Pram stood on the bridge, watching the capsule make its way through its own jump point, smiling softly. Never a bad idea to have a backup in play, and a part of him was really hoping Vers made it through this so that he could face her himself.

- The Helion then made its final approach through the atmosphere of Zen-Whoberi, preparing for landing, billions of soldiers worth of Kree waiting near jump points off the surface of Hala for the final command. Their numbers would be replenished one way or another.

- Inside the capsule itself, the being inside smiled as well. It had been doing some reading too, the information plastered on the inside surface of its capsule. It had never been given a chance to test out its skills, and now it had a good idea of exactly what to do. Somewhere deep inside, it had the
understanding that the Supreme Intelligence had programmed it in a certain number of ways to want to do what it wanted to do, but it also didn't know how to break free of that programming. Why beat it if you can join it?

- The Skrull ship landed as close as it could get to the University of New Orleans in order to escape detection, the three of them exiting the ship in their civvies (and disguises for the two Skrulls, Keller and Romanoff once again), so that they wouldn't have to worry about any more awkward questions. It was briefly discussed as to whether or not they should call Maria and then they decided against it, the last thing they'd want to do is make Maria come there herself and try to pick a fight. This was a huge mistake, in retrospect.

- A situation of a classified nature had begun to take up Fury's attention, concerning the illegal development of some sort of device meant to replicate the effects of the Super-Soldier Serum (he'd always hated the propaganda title for it) in a lab in a private college in Virginia, and SHIELD agents began to monitor it with the intent of doing something about it in case these damn fool scientists actually tried to go ahead and finish it and, even worse, try to test it out on someone. Even more troubling was when Fury's contacts had discovered that the person funding the experiments was a literal Lieutenant General.

- Goose had already arrived in New Orleans herself, and she now stalked the campus, trying to figure out where Monica could be through the sea of scents she was encountering. A lot of the two-legs were offering her very yummy treats and even when they didn't, she would eat the entire contents of trash cans and essentially anything else, dissolving it atom-by-atom inside the vast pocket dimension that was her belly, and her inability to be injured or poisoned by conventional means helped greatly in this venture.

One final note: Leigh Marshall conveniently invited Monica Rambeau to her very first college party that night. To Leigh's credit, she had absolutely no idea that she was being tracked by a superpowered Terrran, two Skrulls and a really pissed off flerken, not to mention whatever was in that strange Kree capsule.

Monica discovered from being at the party, with nobody she knew aside from Leigh, that she did not respond very well to the amount of light and sound and noise she was experiencing. She had never had a beer before and found it disgusting, but continued to sip from it, not really knowing what else to do as she watched Leigh get more and more inebriated, chatting happily with everyone else there. The jealousy she felt wasn't exactly that Leigh wasn't talking to her, but that she didn't exactly know how to talk to anyone else.

So she stood in a corner, incorrectly believing her mother and Auntie Carol hadn't had this problem (they'd both confirm later that they were only ever really social when the other was around), sipping on the beer and grimacing at the taste and forgetting to drink water alongside it so the hangover wouldn't be too painful the next morning. There were a couple occasions in which random people would offer her a shot of something and she'd take it, way too nervous to say no, but it didn't seem to be having the effect on her that it was having on everyone else. She hadn't yet realized that part of the fun bit of now having a bit of Kree in her was that it gave her an insane amount of resistance to the effects of alcohol and other narcotic substances. If she'd been able to read people a little better, she'd be able to tell that Leigh was highly exaggerating its effects.

Funny thing was, Leigh had no particular plan to hurt Monica, the entire party was planned as a way to loosen her up a bit and get her more comfortable so that she'd be less prepared for whatever time the order came to take care of her and use her as a bargaining chip against that Kree traitor.
Nothing insidious in mind for tonight, Leigh just made the assumption Monica liked all the same things she did.

Finally, around an hour or so later, Leigh made her way over to her, clasping an arm around her and asking her, at least Monica could interpret from what little lip reading she could do, how much of a good time she was having. Monica had enough sense to lie and try to tell her how much she was enjoying the occasion. Leigh then asked, she thought, if she’d met anyone there she was interested in or thought that they were cute. Monica was honestly not sure, that was never something she thought about very much.

That being said, despite the Kree resistance to alcoholic substances from C-53, that didn’t mean there was no effect, and the two of them were definitely tipsy from the amount that they had. Someone began passing around a joint and they both partook of it, the same sort of resistance applying so it felt thoroughly like a waste of time to both of them.

And then they’d both wandered outside of the party, laughing and talking and loosening up a little bit, wandering around, completely losing track of where they were going, they wandered so far that they’d ended up in Couturie Forest, a little while away. Nothing but woods and wildlife as far as the eye could see, tripping over tree branches and leaves, laughing hysterically. It was a miracle they hadn’t been caught by anyone on their way there.

Monica had by her side, the entire time, a duffel bag that she’d gotten some weird questions about, but she had never had to open since it did contain the Kree suit she’d modified after taking it from Yon-Rogg. She had it everywhere now, always getting ready for the moment that Auntie Carol might need her. Whenever that might be.

Then two things happened at once:

1. Leigh tripped and fell and knocked Monica over also, the two of them tumbling and spinning over each other until Monica was on top of Leigh, the moonlight of the full moon coursing down and illuminating her face.

2. Said moonlight let Monica get a good look at her eyes for the first time, and suddenly she saw Yon-Rogg again the moment before she vaporized him, and the eyes were exactly the same.

Sorry, three things:

3. Monica said drunkenly: "holy shit, you're one of them."

Wait, four:

4. She immediately flew off of Leigh as she received a mighty punch to the face the moment she figured it all out.

Still holding the duffel bag, she went flying until she collided with the nearest tree, a good ten feet away, the photon energy instinctively coursing through her to prevent all but bruising where the back of her head collided with it. She fell to the ground on her knees as Leigh walked towards her methodically.

"See, that I didn't know," Leigh said in response.

Monica's only response was to reach her arm out and try the same trick her Auntie Carol had also been practicing, the various bits and pieces of the Kree armor flying out of the duffel bag with the help of the photon energy, attaching themselves to her. The only difference was that she liked to keep the mask up over her face, it made her look different from Auntie Carol aside from the color.
Leigh let her do this, because it was all quite interesting, that by some weird accident, her target had actually become the second Terran to technically become Kree. No blood transfusion, so it should be interesting to see how she differed from the traitor. And also because if her cover was blown, she sure as hell wasn't letting her alert anyone.

"I'm not trying to hurt you, Monica!" Leigh yelled out, really wanting to avoid a direct fight if she absolutely had to. She had no qualms with killing an adult woman who deserved it, but killing someone barely into adulthood whose only crime was being unfortunately connected to that traitor was not on her to-do list. Monica didn't seem to obey, only letting the distinctive light-blue glow wash over her hands, holding them out in as close to a fighting pose as she could manage.

"She's off limits."

"Off limits? C'mon, Mon-Mon. This is a part of an intergalactic conflict you want no part in. I know emotional attachment is one of those major Terran weaknesses but the faster you wean yourself of it, the faster you'll grow."

"You didn't talk like this when you were trying to fool me. I thought you were my friend!"

Leigh blanched, just a little, because she did genuinely like the kid, in spite of it all. "I am your friend. But my mission comes first. If you knew how long I had before a mission, you'd understand. I have a lot to prove."

"You don't have to prove anything to me."

"Sorry, Mon-Mon," Leigh said, meaning it. "This is for your own good."

And as one, they leaped at each other. Perhaps in a different time, with no Supreme Intelligence pulling the strings, perhaps Monica and Leigh could've remained friends a bit longer than they did, a grand total of a few measly months.

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter today, but we're nearish to the endgame now. Nearish. We'll get there. I think. If I'm calculating this right, but I do appreciate your patience. The lil yarn has taken on a life of its own.

Couturie Forest is a real place! For those who have been there, I hope the depiction is somewhat accurate!

Comments, suggestions, improvements, new books to try reading, all go down below!

- G
The Family That Slays Together Stays Together

Chapter Summary

As it turned out, the gang didn't have as much to fear from Leigh Marshall as previously expected. Someone is clearly up to something, someone has an agenda, a plan they can't quite figure out yet. All they know is that the biggest battle is up ahead, but not before one more surprise may very well take them all out for good.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Carol, Talos and Soren had not stopped running. They were all getting exhausted even with their added strength and stamina, it had been over an hour and someone was throwing a party that apparently wasn't typical. Police cars were already coming in to disrupt it, and every student there was too drunk to properly answer any questions. Some called them "narc," and they didn't have time to figure out whatever that was supposed to mean, and they would've gotten angrier had they suddenly not heard screams and yells and saw a mixture of kids pouring in from some distance away, saying that there were explosions coming from Couturie Forest.

Soren grabbed the brawniest of that new group by the throat and demanded to know where that was, they were given as good of directions as they could expect from a drunken dumbass, and Carol grabbed them both by the shoulders and flew right off, a little too angry to try and hide the photon energy. Luckily, it seemed as though these kids had been tripping on some sort of psychedelic substance so when this was reported to the police in a similar state, they attributed it to that circumstance.

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Leigh won pretty fast.

As expected.

Monica put up a fight for someone who had almost no idea how to fight, she'd been taught how to fly and so her moves had consisted of flying at Leigh with top speed and colliding with her like a living bullet. These blows, the drunkenness not helping, made her relatively easy to subdue, but Leigh had no intention of killing her. What to do now, she wasn't really sure, but she had to run, fast, and she probably had to take Monica with her as some kind of leverage.

She'd been able to dodge Monica's latest attack and crack her on the head with a nearby thick branch and that seemed to have taken her out for the count. She intentionally dripped some of her own thera-fluid from the puncture Monica had opened up on her Kree datapad onto the back of her head to heal any openings there so it wouldn't get affected, but then Monica had just regained consciousness long enough for Leigh to panic and hit her in the forehead with the same branch, knocking her out again.

Several things happened now:

1. She turned upon hearing an angry scream from the sky and saw the distinctive light yellow glow
she'd been waiting for, cackled and screamed out "No sudden movements!"

2. There was a sudden movement, but not from Carol, who remained hovering in the air as Talos and Soren dropped ten feet each to the ground, Skrull-grade pistols drawn at aimed at Leigh.

3. Leigh felt something wrap around her leg and she screamed as a tentacle she hadn't previously seen pick her up off the ground and smash her head into a tree as hard as it possibly could. It was a blow that would've killed an ordinary Terran but Leigh was a Kree so this would've only given her a mild concussion if it hadn't done so repeatedly, each time with greater force, and by perhaps the twentieth or so time the back of her head collided with the tree trunk, her neck was good and shattered.

4. With a sickening squelching noise, Goose sucked the corpse right back inside herself, promising herself she'd dissolve this one last.

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From inside the Atlanta facility, Tir-Zar and Zyro turned on Leigh's datapad feed, having seen her activate for the first time, only to get a strange glimpse of her body being thrown around and sickening crunching noises. They handed it off to Fury, who also saw an unconscious Monica and Carol, Talos and Soren staring in horror at what they were looking at.

Fury shrugged as the two literally shivered, showing him the feed on their arms. "Don't fuck with a flerken."

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Aboard the Helion, Zen-Pram blanched watching the same footage.

"How come we didn't know they had a fucking flerken?" Zen-Pram yelled out to no one in particular.

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"What do you mean, she's unconscious?" Maria screamed over the nearest pay phone as the others all blushed.

"She was unconscious," Carol said patiently, "but Talos and Soren checked her and she's only got mild bruising, no concussions whatsoever, and Goose took care of her assailant."

"You mean her best friend from college was a Kree?" Maria yelled out, causing Carol to wince and Monica to blush sheepishly.

"Yes, but now she's dead," Carol said with as much patience as before. "This isn't how I expected to hear from you again."

"I'm not mad," Maria said, "but I am terrified for all of you. Come back here right now."

So they did.

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Fury got right to work. In the coming days, he'd resort to some drastic measures in order to try and resolve everything. He'd soon regret it.

The second he'd heard what Goose had done to Monica's now-former best friend, he had a SHIELD
transport pick the flerken up and transport her right back to the Atlanta branch so that he could put things into place. He had to work really quickly, around the resources being diverted to that lab in Virginia where things were heating up, that army general guy doing a bunch of illegal and unethical shit at a college called Culver. Whatever he had left went to the spin, which had always been the worst part of being at SHIELD, how often you had to lie.

The first thing was getting Goose to expel the body she'd just sucked up, and that took more time than it was worth. Goose had enough of an understanding by now of Terran talk to be able to know exactly what he wanted, but expelling a morsel when she herself did not choose to do so went against everything she stood for as a proud flerken existing in this universe. The Tesseract, as a Xorrian artifact of almost perpetual energy, certainly helped during the days in which she had nothing to dissolve in the pocket dimension of her stomach atom by atom, but she would give up a snack? For what? She had saved the good two-legs! The small one who loved to give her lots of pets and scritches between her ears, which is where she loved her scritches! She also had given her a strange thing that she discovered she quite liked to scritch herself a lot, and a thingie described as "catnip" that made her feel sooooooooooo good!

Goose realized, of course, that taking the form of a four-legs perhaps had its weaknesses, but she could at least understand why the form she had selected was certainly the most advanced on this planet. Even if the small two-legs was the lowest form of life, she certainly had Mastery of Scritchings, and Goose had done a Good Thing, and even though she understood that small two-legs was currently hurt and needed to recover, she expected lots of extra pets and head scritches as a reward the second she was feeling better, and not a moment before!

So the one-eyed two-legs demanding the morsel was a no-no, and she would've scratched out his other eye had she not already figured out that he would need at least one of those to properly see. Many of the two-legs could not see out of either eye, but Goose had encountered enough to see that they had figured out lots of neat ways to be able to see without eyes, as far as she understood. Two-legs could be neat like that. Either way, it was clear that One-Eyed Two-Legs wanted to help Small Two-Legs, the Master of Scritches, so Goose spat out Leigh Marshall's corpse with the provision that she'd better get it back soon.

The next part of the plan: a press release stating that someone called Leigh Marshall had killed Monica and Maria Rambeau. Her mother had valiantly tried to rescue her, but to no avail, and they both died in the ensuing struggle after she kidnapped her daughter. The bodies of the victims had been identified but out of respect, they would not be given a public funeral. It did not matter, of course, that their funerals were both empty caskets and only Monica's father and his new family attended. They had no more biological family left. Fury had gotten Maria's permission, and she didn't care anymore. If she couldn't stop her daughter and the love of her life, then she was going to fight with them wherever they went.

Fury didn't like having to do that, but he wasn't sure how else to explain the Rambeaus' sudden disappearance. He had a sinking feeling that they were going to get themselves killed out there in Zen-Whoberi, and even if they came back, he wasn't so sure either would want to resume their former lives anyway. The universe wasn't allowing them to, and anyone in Carol's proximity just didn't have a normal life.

It made local news, and Fury had been able to contain it to just local news. He swore to himself that he wasn't going to pull anything like this again unless he absolutely had to, but the last thing the Rambeaus needed were people digging around. The last thing they needed were conspiracy theorists. The University swore up and down it had no idea that their prized student Leigh Marshall had murderous tendencies to begin with. They weren't wrong, all things considered. Leigh Marshall had never actually killed in cold blood before. Nor would she ever. But she had tried to kill
Monica, even if she had weakly justified the reason, so smearing her in the press and making her the target of local derision was the only way Fury could find a way to untangle this mess without getting the people he cared about in trouble.

Fury would (mostly) keep his word regarding manipulating the media. In the coming years, such things would only make matters far worse. He’d learn his lesson the hard way, but he’d been Director for less than a week and made some bad calls in justifying some hasty decisions. Things would correct themselves in the end, and the security state he had accidentally enabled via Pierce would crumble. Fury would deeply regret his involvement in that, even if he had never meant any harm deep down. The surveillance state had existed far before him, and it would never go away entirely until a certain Purple Titan would do something drastic, but he sure as hell made sure it would go away after that. Fury would spend the rest of his life trying to redeem himself.

But for now, he tried to minimize the amount of people who would try digging into this.

There was a couple who figured out some of it anyway, and their conclusions were wildly off base, as Fury had expected. But it could’ve been worse.

It felt strange to have everyone but Fury assembled, but he'd checked in from Atlanta to confirm everything and to note that if not for the situation brewing in Virginia, he'd be right down there.

"You're not seeing me for a while, Fury," Carol said over Maria's phone, "I know this is really abrupt, but--"

"Zen-Whoberi," Fury said, "I know. Tweedle-Dee and Tweedle-Dum explained it to me."

"Who's that?" They heard one of them (their voices sounded too similar) say over the phone.

"Noble warrior heroes of C-53," Fury said in response, and they all let out a tension-relieving laugh at this.

"Stockholm Syndrome kicks in fast," Maria said.

"Thank god it works the same on Hala," Fury said, and then Carol tuned out the rest of the conversation to continue looking at Monica and holding her close, because now she had two things to guilt herself over that was nowhere near her fault. Carol wasn't really sure what she could say, aside from that this is how she felt all the time. Talos and Soren stood awkwardly in the corner of Maria's kitchen, not entirely sure what could be done about any of these developments.

Fury ended the call with "I know Carol's having a moment, and I respect that, but tell her there's no time limit on when I need to hear from her again, that I'm a big boy and I can take care of myself. She will be missed, though."

And that was it.

Maria came over to give both of the beloved women in her life a hug, not entirely sure what else to do herself, only to flinch backwards when Monica said "I'm going with Auntie Carol to this planet."

Maria and Carol both said "what?" in response.

"I am," Monica said. "You're not talking me out of it. I don't work as a college student. I hate it there. I appreciate Uncle Nick for paying for it, but I'm going with her. I'm no use to this planet."
There's no job here that I want. You don't even like your job."

"Baby," Maria said patiently, "I don't do my job because I like it. I do it so we have food on the table."

"Uncle Nick would pay you a fortune to fly his planes for him," Monica said in response. "I know Auntie Carol will say no, because she'll try to protect me like she always does, but I'm going with her. Either she lets me or I find my way there anyway."

"Excuse me, miss," Talos said patiently, "but the only ones on this planet with the jump points needed to get there is the two of us, and we're sure as hell not disobeying Maria."

Maria stayed silent for several long seconds, causing everyone to glance at her uncomfortably, before she coughed and said, "fine."

"Seriously?"

"On one condition."

"What's that?"

"I'm going, too."

"No," Carol said.

"Yes," Maria said. "Non-negotiable. You're the other reason I'm going. I have a Kree rifle still. I'm good with it, I know how to use it, and I know how to kill them. You're no longer having the privilege of riding in like the big hero, all on your lonesome. It's killing you, and either I'm dying at the same time as you or I'm not dying at all."

"Maria," Carol said, pleading with her.

"Carol," Maria said softly, "this isn't up for debate. I keep trying to build a life on this planet and the planet isn't letting me. So if I can't stop my daughter and I can't stop the woman I love, then I'm going with them."

"You what?" was all Carol could say in that moment, processing everything at once.

"Told you so," Soren said, eyes lighting up mischievously, causing Carol to genuinely glare at her for the first time on record.

"I'll go by myself then," Maria said, "and you'll have to go after me to stop me from taking on their whole army by myself, which I will do, because I'm fed up with them and what they're doing to my family. I will fucking break them," and then she went over to the glass jar overstuffed with bills with her name on it, and stuffed a dollar bill inside.

"You're just going to enable her like this?" Carol said helplessly, looking at Talos and Soren.

The two just shrugged in unison. "We're warriors, love," Talos said, "it's in our genes. It's what bonds us. Maybe it's insanity, maybe it's something else, but there's a planet in need and maybe we can help in some small way. Maybe we won't save everyone, but maybe we can save a few, and maybe we can put the fear of the Skrulls into them. We're going regardless. We're all going to keep on trying to talk everyone else out of going to the point where we're all going to go. So let's just eliminate the middleman, to use one of your planet's favorite phrases, and all go. Rain mighty hell down on the fuckers." He then went over to Maria's jar, winking at her, and clinked down a metal
"But you're--" Carol tried to say, but Maria placed a single outstretched finger over her lips.

"Weaker? Without powers? I don't need any of that nonsense to be dangerous. I don't need a crutch like you two do."

"That's uncalled for, Mom--"

"Baby, you're in so much trouble, and instead of grounding you, you and Mom are going to bond by doing our damndest to break a fascist regime in half with ridiculous chances." Maria stormed off, out of the room, presumably to grab the rifle in question, leaving Carol to fold her arms and let out a "harrumph!", not having any other way to express how annoyed and worried she was.

"I'm supposed to go by myself," Carol said weakly, but Soren just let out a loud laugh.

"To use your phrasing, bullshit. You just want to go out like one of those Terran heroes, who take on the whole army by themselves and die anyway, and accomplish nothing. What you're supposed to do is realize a few others out there have the same enemies you do."

Soren went over to Monica and said, "You're nowhere near ready." She then proceeded to place her own piece of Skrull currency in Maria's swear jar.

"I know."

"Spoken like a true Skrull. Rushing headfirst, the odds be damned." She lightly slapped Monica on the cheek, causing the girl to laugh hysterically at the farce of it all, still clad in her Kree suit. Then Soren proceeded to put another piece of Skrull currency in Maria's swear jar, causing Maria to glare and Soren to wink.

"Carol Danvers." Soren said.

"Yes?"

"You ready to die?"

"Fine," Carol said, glaring but smiling a little underneath it, because they all had to acknowledge how crazy this plan was, there was no foresight in it. No planning, no nothing, just charging at oblivion. Only this found family would do something so foolhardy.

"But I'm not waiting up for you once we're there."

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A lot of things added to foolhardy choices. Lack of sleep and self-care, for one. Superpowered Terrans could abuse their bodies through neglect more than average but it had an effect. This wasn't intentional, of course. But that had been Zen-Pram's entire plan, the death of a thousand cuts, forcing them into so many places at once that they'd neglect themselves further and further till they'd be practically shattered by the time they reached them. He wanted to drive the corkscrew in real tight.

One final twist before they made the journey, one final twist to ensure that they wouldn't succeed in keeping the Kree from the replenishments that they so desperately needed.

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The being approached the Rambeau residence. It looked through the window at all of them chatting in the kitchen, though the one-eyed man it had been told about and had seen in the files wasn't there. It hadn't stopped smiling since it had landed. The smile never ever went away, it just kept growing. It had spent so long in dormancy, and now it was getting its chance to do what it had been programmed to do.

The only Kree glyph on its capsule had been Ruul, so Ruul it would have to be.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the cheesy title, that's meant to be literal slaying.

I was at a local con yesterday, so I apologize for the lack of chapter! Got a couple neat pieces of Carol art, but sadly there was nothing of anyone else. There was one of a grown up Monica, but it was very demeaning and so I decided against buying it. I like to collect some of those smaller five dollar prints at the local cons (cuz I sure as hell can't get the huge thousand dollar ones some of those have, especially the big cons).

Anyway! Another unconventional chapter! We're switching perspectives more often, and I'm trying to decide which is more effective! We're still canon! For now! Far From Home accidentally validated a good bit of it.

Comments! Suggestions! Improvements! Horoscopes! I'm a Pisces! Down Below!

- G
Chapter Summary

CONTENT WARNING:

There is no violent content in this chapter (at least not anything beyond a PG-13 rating), nor anything of an explicit nature, and I would never include that kind of content without the proper tags and warnings. That being said, I drew a bit from a lot of my own personal fears for this chapter and I wanted to be sensitive to every individual person reading this. If you've dealt a lot with depression, anxiety and issues regarding self-esteem, this might be triggering but it also felt necessary to include considering how much I've struggled with all of that and more throughout my life and how much the film made me feel validated and connected to the characters for similar reasons.

If there's any additional tags I should add for any reason, please let me know and I'll add them to their proper places as soon as I possibly can.

The gang are quite strong for Terrans, but they are just Terrans. They don't just have physical weaknesses, they have mental and emotional weaknesses as well. They have been tested in their strength and their combat proficiency, but now they will be tested in the matters of the heart. The one to test them is called Ruul.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For the first time in quite some time, Carol had been left alone.

Not intentionally. Talos and Soren had gone back to the ship to make some adjustments and Maria was checking Monica over in her bedroom, stitching up a nasty gash on her forehead with her first aid kit and comforting her about not being able to figure out in time exactly what her supposed friend had really been. This left Carol alone, not really sure how to help any of them, in the kitchen, at the table, lost in her thoughts, debating whether or not she should try to overpower the Skrulls and take their ship. They'd be mad at her, but they'd be guaranteed to live. She didn't like that they all kept on insisting on going with her, and she knew Fury would too if he wasn't pre-occupied by something else.

She distracted herself for a little while checking in with Khn'nr on Tarnax through her communicator, and even he noted just how exhausted and worn out she sounded. He kept on insisting that as soon as this business was done, as soon as she took on this army that both sides knew was coming to Zen-Whoberi, that she needed to detox somehow, take a break, so she'd be ready for the next fight.

An issue that had come up during the conversation is that the residents of the planet had no means of interstellar communication, so she had no way of warning them. They didn't have the capability
for space travel either. There really was next to nothing known about it sans that it seemed to be about C-53 levels of advancement in their technology. They contrasted the Centaurians by having green skin instead of blue, but that was really it. They kept to themselves and you rarely saw them off of their home planet, and they seemed very ill-equipped to deal with a sudden invasion. It made them perfect targets for the Kree and whoever this outside party was that everyone kept mentioning, that not even most of the members of Zen-Pram's fighting force knew the identity of.

Khn'nr had promised to send out a scouting ship (a smaller model than what Talos and Soren typically used, more for stealth and speed rather than purely combat and defense) to begin monitoring the planet for any signs of an invasion. Kree would send their own scouting ships first, as Carol relayed the sort of strategies that she herself had once employed on them. Then anyone in a position of leadership would either be given the choice to assimilate or be killed all at once, as the entire fighting force, led by the Accusers, most likely, would pile in all at once and overwhelm with sheer numbers.

The risk associated with the scout ship was that either the Kree ships had arrived already and the invasion would be imminent (Khn'nr wasn't comfortable sending in Skrull to infiltrate, who could be then falsely accused of trying to invade themselves), or that they would arrive, immediately discover them, and initiate the full attack by the Accusers anyway. The second the entire army arrived is the moment the battle would become insurmountable. Carol could take out the tiny fleet sent years earlier to destroy C-53, but to take on billions at once, everyone knew how impossible that would be.

The other major cause for concern, again, was this outside party. The Skrull had already been trying to figure out why the Kree were breaking centuries of tradition to contract additional forces for a planet that couldn't possibly defend itself anyway. The residents of Zen-Whoberi were nowhere near prepared, and there was no way to warn them without getting themselves blown out of the sky by what defenses the planet did possess. Khn'nr told Carol to mentally prepare herself for the eventuality that even if they succeeded entirely in averting this attack, that a lot of innocents were likely to die. They could even be using it intentionally as bait to draw her away from wherever the real point of attack was.

The Kree honor system, and Carol accidentally sullying the honor of one of Hala's most prominent individuals, had to be the reason why the Kree were making otherwise bizarre tactical decisions. There was a lot of influential people who wanted payback and wanted to be able to enjoy their benefits of years of service without the side-eye and the awkward looks. Yon-Rogg had been well on his way to those same benefits when Carol had permanently screwed him over. She didn't regret that choice, she'd had to make it very quickly to get all of the Kree as far away from her home planet as possible. But even so, she wondered if perhaps there was a better way she could've employed all those years earlier.

Khn'nr signed off, making her promise daily updates to him, as they'd begin to use whatever resources they had to try and investigate this, possibly with help from the Xandarians or Asgardians using her name as leverage. That made Carol very uncomfortable, but it had to be done, she had leverage with both. She had no intention of playing a political game unless she absolutely had to.

Maria entered the room, saying nothing. She'd been extremely tired when they'd first arrived, Carol had noted that. Lot of bratty rich clients and their private planes, complaining about having to schlep to the bayou in order to get the best mechanic in all of Louisiana. Maria had hugged Monica very tightly and then Carol, looking as though she'd been crying for several hours, and Maria was not known to cry often unless extremely stressed. She was not easy to shake, but the last Carol had seen of her, the tears were still fresh and stained on her face. She must've done something different,
because it seemed as though she hadn't been crying at all.

Carol was deeply exhausted, so much so, even with some more sleep, she just shut her eyes and leaned back in the chair, sighing quietly to herself, the sigh stopping a little as she suddenly felt Maria's hands in her hair, caressing her, and as she felt them going down to her cheeks, her hands weren't as rough as before. Maria's hands were nowhere near callused, but she worked on planes all day, hers were nowhere near dainty. She must've put on a new lotion of some kind.

Her eyes opened as Maria's hands moved to her neck, wrapped around her throat, and Maria had never done that before, but perhaps it was a Terran thing that they did and Maria simply didn't want to make her too uncomfortable before. Eyes still opened, Maria just silently leaned in and kissed her. For the first time, Carol did not have the sudden rush of feeling and emotion associated with it, it just felt like mouth. Not unpleasant, but just mouth, but perhaps that was a Terran effect of being tired.

And suddenly she was on the floor. Blinking, because Maria had punched her, hard, much harder than she'd ever expect, in the jaw, and her head hit the floor with a loud crack. Before she could react, she let out a loud cough as Maria kicked her hard in the mouth and she tasted her own blood, everything receding, dissociating, her whole being torn up by this.

You couldn't trust her after all, her mind screamed at her as she began to stumble up to her feet. She's just like everyone else, you were right to distrust her, how could be you be so stupid, and she felt the sensation of a scream building up and repressed it. Why wasn't Monica stopping this, why wasn't Talos and Soren, were they all in league against her, she couldn't trust any of them--

Maria just smiled, a wide rictus grin she'd never smiled before, a smile of pure sadistic joy, and all of that would've been nearly enough to break Carol's already overwhelmed mind if another Maria hadn't suddenly walked in and yelled out and jumped on top of the thing.

The one Maria's hands went around the throat of the Maria who had attacked her, and when she was thrown back by that Maria, the texture of the skin had changed, something slimier and more porous, not quite Terran anymore, and now Carol could tell between the two as she just kept on coughing.

That Maria with the strange throat now yelled out at the other Maria in what was a very guttural form of the Kree tongue, something along the lines of a warning to not interfere where you don't belong, and now Carol had the time she needed to react again, pushing off with the photon energy just enough to grab this Non-Maria by the same place on her throat and try to drag her out.

The Non-Maria just kept smiling the rictus grin and swatted her back again, into the bookcases, the wall impacting and practically shattering as she slammed against it, hard, but rage had now replaced any fear. Maria jumped on the Non-Maria's back just in time for an extremely loud yell to ring out from the other room.

Carol screamed out "sorry!" in Maria's direction regarding her beloved books, but Maria was too busy wrapping the Non-Maria into a chokehold, falling backwards onto the ground, arms around its throat, choking it more and more, every place she touched reverting back to that strange, almost amphibious texture of skin. It continued choking, hacking, wheezing, gasping for breath, and it was able to reach out with an arm and grab the approaching Carol, causing her to trip and fall on top of them both.

With the free arm, it pulled her close to its now gaping and sharp-toothed maw that was developing out of it and said with a raspy whisper, slowly and surely, "I am Ruul. Zen-Pram sends his regards." Maria squeezed tighter and it let out one more heaving choking gasp and went limp, upon
which she released it and the two immediately began to rush to the shed, where Carol had already
discovered that a length of steel cable was contained, normally for the planes but now for this
Ruell.

Carol had one more place left to go.

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Ruell, if that's what it was really called, had cables wrapped up its entire length. It had reverted now
to its ordinary appearance, or whatever was closest to it, spiked teeth and slimy skin.

Maria now had to rush to the kitchen as she heard another commotion, namely Carol aiming a
photon blast at both Talos and Soren, practically spitting as she was yelling, the two of them
backing up with hands raised. Talos, noticeably, had a really nasty wound on his throat, a
combination of bruises and skin either burned or torn off, and both he and Soren looked deeply
disturbed, not just by their longtime friend suddenly threatening to attack them.

"What else in the galaxy shapeshifts?" Carol said, voice growing strangely calm, photon blasts still
aimed. "What else can do that aside from you, because you've got very little time to answer that
question."

Finally, practically choking with anger: "I thought I could trust you!"

SMACK.

Carol stumbled backwards, Maria having to catch her, Soren's face in a glare. Carol rubbed her left
cheek as it began to redden from the impact and looked about ready to try again, if not for Soren
glaring so fiercely that she had to stop herself.

"Shapeshifting." Soren said flatly.

"What about it?" Carol said.

"You see a shapeshifter, and you say, 'yes, must be those sneaky Skrulls. Must be those dastardly,
conniving Skrulls who look like you but are not like you. They secretly control everything behind
the scenes, don't they, but I met the good ones.'"

"I don't know what you're getting on about."

"I know you were with them for a time," Soren said, stepping closer. Despite the strength
difference, despite how easily Carol could shatter her if she wanted to, she still instinctually backed
away. "I know what they taught you, and I know they told you we killed Mar-Vell. I know how
difficult it can be to let go of things. But you'd better be letting go faster."

"I thought I could trust you."

"I thought I could trust you," Soren said, "and friendship or no, if you make one more comment
about it--"

"You'll what?" Carol said fiercely, eyes glaring, needing any excuse for a fight she could win, rage
overbearing her mind.

"Mate, c'mon now, we need to process this--" Talos tried to say, but Soren's remaining hand went
over his mouth.
"Sure we do, but I'm not going to take that lying down." Soren said. "I tolerate less from friends than I do from my enemies."

"How do I know that wasn't one of you?" Carol yelled out, Maria having to physically hold her back.

"One of you?" Talos said, imitating Carol's words and teeth baring in anger at the remark.

Soren scoffed, and suddenly changed to look exactly like Carol, causing everyone to jump back. She stepped closer and closer to Carol, grabbing one of her hands roughly in her own, and placed it around her own throat.

"I don't get it," Carol said flatly.

"Feel my skin. Has it changed?"

"No," said Carol.

"Move your hand." Soren said.

Carol did so. The skin she had touched had not changed at all. Slowly, it began to shift back to Soren's original appearance, and she smiled a little, seeing Maria visibly relax a little.

"Whatever that was," Soren said, "it does not change like us. We can be touched without changing. That thing," she said, motioning over to the unconscious Ruul on the floor, "cannot."

Carol's heaving, angry breaths began to slow down and calm a bit, to the point where Maria could let go of her. They spent what felt like an eternity staring at each other as the tension slowly went out of the room. Both their expressions changed slowly from one of anger to one of hurt and pain, even avoiding each other's gaze a little. Talos and Maria shared an awkward look, but neither made any movement to try and rush things along.

"Oh," was all Carol could finally let out.

"Trust," said Soren, "is something you earn." She pushed past everyone else to leave the room, before suddenly gasping, turning around, and saying to Maria: "Monica."

They all shared a look and all four ran in the direction of Monica's room as fast as they could.

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Monica, thankfully, wasn't visibly hurt at all. That was the good news.

The bad news is that the second she saw Carol and Maria, she let out a terrified yell and Talos and Soren had to rush into the room in order to comfort her, as she cried in their arms for quite a while.

"What happened, love?" Talos asked, with as much softness and tenderness as he could muster given his injuries.

"Which one of them is real?" Monica said, voice shaking.

"Both," said Soren, "we've got it tied up in your mom's office. You can go see it."

"I'll go keep watch," Talos said, and stood up and made his way past Carol and Maria, giving them both a squeeze on the shoulder.
That just left Monica, head buried now in Soren's shoulder, shaking so violently that they all worried a little that she was going to pass out from the stress. The two tried to move closer, but Monica just let out a whimper and they stepped back.

"What happened?" Soren said.

"Auntie Carol came in first," Monica said softly, glaring at Carol. "And she told me that they'd gotten tired of me, that I wasn't shaping up, that Mom hated it here and she was planning to run away, but having a brat kid they had to take care of was too much. She told me how Mom regretted having me, regretted how much money she wasted on me, and that they were going to leave me to fend for myself."

"Sweetheart," Soren said, stroking her head with her hand softly, giving the two a very concerned look.

"And I told her that Mom never said that, so she left, and then Mom came in and told me everything was true, and that tomorrow they were going to leave me behind, and if I starved, it wasn't their problem anymore. I was just a waste of space, someone they just tolerated, someone they made excuses for," Monica said, refusing to look in their direction.

A quiet sort of rage was washing over Carol again, at this thing, whatever it was. The word "Ruu1" sounded familiar. Something about it was familiar, she'd heard of something or seen something like it. She couldn't place her finger on it.

Soren said, "Watch this, honey," and softly moved away from her, towards Carol and Maria. "Now, was there anything strange about Auntie Carol or your mother?"

"They tried to touch me, and their skin felt weird, I don't know why. Their hands were both so sweaty and clammy."

"Good," said Soren, "so I want you to trust me, OK? I'm going to prove they are the real deal."

"How can I know?" Monica asked, curling up in the covers and shivering. They'd never seen her this frightened, they were so used to her being the really headstrong one.

Soren took Carol's hand and led her into the room, Monica refusing to look. "Sweetie," Soren said, "can you reach out and touch Auntie Carol's hand for me? If she's the fake, then she'll feel slimy like the faker--"

"What if there's no faker?" Monica yelled out. "What if they've thought this about me and never said it before? I didn't mean to be an inconvenience to anyone! I didn't mean to waste Mom's money on college--"

"Sweetie," said Soren, "Fury is paying for your college."

"What?" Monica said, looking up and sniffing.

"Fury is paying for that, not her. How would your mother get something like that so wrong? Just trust me," and she began to move Carol's hand closer to Monica's, who shivered and reached out very hesitantly, and clasped it in her own.

"Not slimy," Monica finally said, several seconds of shivering later, Carol just seething with anger. "You just kept calling me Monica Rambeau, my full name, and I asked you what my name was and you didn't know, I asked what my army name was--"
"Lieutenant Trouble," Carol said, smiling warmly at her. "How could I ever forget that?"

"And you said your name was Vers--"

"My name," said Carol forcefully, "is Carol."

Monica looked down at their hands, joined together, looking it over very hesitantly.

They then heard an awkward thudding noise as Talos reappeared at the room, holding the now semi-conscious Ruul by the shoulders, and smiled warmly at Monica before grabbing it by the throat and saying, "show her." Ruul initially refused and tried to spit at him, the salive landing on the door frame, and then it let out a yell as Talos smashed its head into the door frame so hard it drew blood and everyone else recoiled.

"Show her!" Talos screamed directly into Ruul's ear with a guttural roar and it recoiled, letting out high pitched squeaking noises before going silent.

Ruuul let out a cough before changing only its head into Carol, and then Maria. The same slightly off appearance was on both heads, they were both a little too perfect. They didn't have the flaws at all, practically like living mannequins.

"Good," said Talos, and let go and began to drag Ruul back downstairs. "You've got a lot of explaining to do," they heard him say as they heard the downstairs open, "and not much time to explain it in."

At once, Monica practically leaped forward into Carol's arms, holding her tighter, and Carol hugged her back so very tightly. She'd had the angry feeling for most of the conversation that she just wanted to hit this Ruul over and over until maybe the anger would be gone, like she was used to before, but the embrace was all she needed, it practically fueled her, it was like a thousand years of sleep all at once.

"I love you so goddamn much, Lieutenant Trouble," Carol said softly. The yellow and blue glows of their respective photon energies emerged, but instead of its destructive potential, it warmed the room the same way that Carol could remember a happier memory as a child, when she lay in her laundry as soon as it was out of the dryer, the kind of warmth she hadn't gotten to feel often then, and the yellow and blue intensified when Maria joined in. Soren could only smile for a few seconds at this, and then rush back downstairs to check on her husband and to see what medical attention she could provide. Not before she gave Maria a somewhat sympathetic look, and a vicious glare at Carol that was only just barely able to hide to massive amount of hurt she felt towards her, and then she was gone.

They all heard quiet muffled sobs as Soren walked slowly down the stairs, sobs that suggested she didn't know they could hear her.

Carol's face slowly fell. The Kree programming wasn't entirely out of her yet. It was no excuse, regardless. She had done a bad thing trying to do a good thing, yet again, and she couldn't be like those that hurt her and not try to genuinely apologize for that.

"What happened?" Monica asked, still a bit dazed, arms still around her neck as if for dear life (which in a way, it was).

"I, uh," Carol said, uncharacteristically lost for words, "I have some making up to do."
Ruul is as close to an OC as we're getting here, though I did base him off of the alternate word for "Kree" in the comics continuity and on a kind of Kree called a "Dire Wraith," so he didn't come from nothing. That being said, the more I wrote the more Ruul became reflective of a lot of things that have scared me. I have had experiences similar to this, where people I thought I could trust turned it all around the second I was no longer useful to them, and it's something I've been terrified of ever since. This chapter in particular comes from a very personal place, and in those moments it seems like something alien has taken over.

That being said, this isn't going to be that bleak for long, so if this is a chapter you didn't enjoy, there won't be a whole lot more of it afterwards. Hopefully it connects to you in some small way, and I appreciate you if you've read this far. If you're skipping down to the bottom because of the content warning, absolutely no judgement whatsoever, my first and foremost concern is writing something meaningful to me and also making sure that I'm being sensitive to everyone's individual experiences.

Either way, thank you for being here thus far.

- G
Tensions have grown, alliances have fractured, the connections they thought they had between each other aren't nearly as strong as previously believed. These have to be mended, quickly, before the final fight begins. There's too much hurt and pain in everyone's past to properly trust one another, especially when two of your number are imbibed with the power of the Xorrian artifacts. Perhaps reuniting with the only one of their number they haven't seen in quite some time might be the mend they all so badly needed.

"It loosely translates, in the ancient tongues, to 'Dire Wraith,'" Talos said about an hour later. They were all at the kitchen table again, expecting just one more visitor before the fight of their lives began. "Zen-Pram sent him. I got everything from him, everything while he was in the capsule on the Helion. They're not to send the scouting ships until two days from now, so we're going to arrive early and get the drop on them. The scouts will activate the signal, and the Accusers can't use the jump points until the scouts give the go-ahead."

"How does that help us?" Maria asked.

"It means that if we get their signals before they can activate them, the Accusers can't physically arrive with their fleets. We'll still have the outside party to contend with, and Ruul didn't know anything about that, except that it's a force that terrifies even Zen-Pram. What he did know was this: it's the Kree who are being contracted and not the other way around."

Carol's eyes widened at this. That was an even bigger break in protocol. The Kree never deigned themselves inferior to any other fighting force, would never work alongside one, and now they were working with someone else? This was very distressing news, but perhaps they could cripple the forces. It would take time they probably did not have. Only a couple days left to get any kind of intel before heading to a planet none of them had ever encountered before.

The mood was still decidedly tense between everyone after Ruul's attack, even if that had been exactly what it had been intending. Just one more twist of the corkscrew on behalf of Zen-Pram before they'd encounter him. The only relief they had is that they'd been able to catch Ruul off-guard and subdue him, and Zen-Pram had been very foolish to try and assume that they'd simply do to him what they had done to Yon-Rogg previously. Talos had checked and re-checked and it didn't seem as though Ruul possessed any kind of datapad at all, no signals were being traced from it. Ruul seemed genuinely panicked in the moments before Talos had personally overseen the amount of Skrull elixir given to it ("Luckily Fury's not here to muck it up again," he quipped), so now it was good and unconscious and ready for transport back to Tarnax. As far as Monica was concerned, they were going to permanently imprison it, but in actuality whatever Skrull scientists they had access to were probably going to subject it to every possible method to extract every memory and bit of info out of its head and then dissect it. Access to a pre-assimilation Kree was simply not something they were going to throw away.
Carol, surprising everyone, had been against this, but Talos had only hissed and said that after everything, she sure as hell didn't get to make that decision for anyone else. Soren was not in the kitchen with everyone else, she was outside in the bayou, off by herself, fuming over the way she and her husband had been treated. Monica was off a distance away trying to float using her own photon energy and largely trying to coordinate it better. Talos wasn't as mad, at least compared to the two of them, but Carol turning on them so quickly had stung deep down, and he was still very much on edge.

Maria and Monica were now the only thing keeping Carol and the Skrulls from outright attacking each other. Monica had calmed down significantly, she at least trusted that Carol and Maria were themselves and that Ruul had been preying on her latent insecurities.

In the interest of keeping Monica calm, they had all agreed to at least remain civil and work together until the Zen-Whoberi situation was resolved, and then they'd all have to sit down and have a serious talk regarding the nature of their relationship. As far as the Rambeaus were concerned, they were still just as close as family to the two of them. As far as Carol was concerned, they had not decided yet.

It was out of what remaining goodwill she had that the Skrulls hadn't immediately rang in to Tarnax and told Khn'nr about it, he was none the wiser and they just didn't have the time to instigate a public conflict between the Skrulls and the Terran trained to kill them. So it was, as Maria described it, a "cold war" between them, which made no sense to anyone else in the room.

Maria decided to pass the time by re-teaching Carol how to play chess, a Terran game they'd apparently been very fond of before the incident that initially separated them. This was enough to get even Talos' attention, and even though he refused to play and pointedly sat much closer to Maria, he still watched very curiously as she and Carol played against each other.

Carol might be one of the most skilled combatants in the known galaxy, but strategy was not really her strong suit ("it never had been," Maria said with a sly grin and a wink at Carol that, despite the previous events, still made her melt internally), and Maria was kicking her ass even after explaining the rules. Soon enough, Talos forgot all about the conflict between them and insisted that he play Maria, and Carol graciously moved over to let him take her place at the board, causing him to give her the first smile of the evening.

Talos caught on much faster than Carol did, practically cackling with glee at an opportunity to be able to deploy some kind of strategy with the limited rulesets of the game. This was Talos in his element, and Soren too if she had decided to come back in, but she was still outside staring expectantly at the sky for whatever reason.

Then Maria did something very strange. There were several of the smallest pieces, called "pawns," and she arranged them in such a way that she was letting one of them be in a position where Talos could take it with one of his pieces. He did so, and Maria suddenly was able to maneuver the board in such a way that she was in a position of offense, controlling the center of the board. Talos and Carol both stared for several seconds in confusion and then Talos let out a hearty cackle and slammed the table with his fist so hard that the pieces wiggled in place on the board.

"Wonderful, mate, wonderful! Now this is an invention worthy of remembering!"

Carol frowned at how eager he seemed to be about losing, but perhaps it wasn't the losing that made him so gleeful, but rather the opportunity to learn something more about combat in a more abstract format. She leaned closer to the board, on Maria's side, staring at the pieces intently. She had the basic idea of what did what by now. The pawns could move two spaces at first, and one after, then diagonally one in order to take a piece, and so on. The queen could go anywhere, the
king went one in any direction. The rooks went straight and the bishops went diagonally and the knights did a weird L-shape. If a pawn made it to the other side of the board than it could itself become a queen, which is how Maria beat Talos for the second time.

It almost hypnotized her, and soon enough she found herself leaning on Maria's shoulder again because it was strangely making her anxious, because instead of the pieces she was seeing multitudes of Kree soldiers bearing down on her, and the rest of them all trapped and wounded, and she felt like a pawn that had to make it all the way across the board to become a queen--

"Carol."

She looked up from her perch on Maria's shoulder, seeing her smile sadly at her.

"You're here with us."

"Yes," Carol blankly said back, looking awkwardly at Talos. Despite the clear sensitivity and hurt in his expression, it had clearly softened a bit, and then she saw the table where her hand had unconsciously gripped, and the corner of it had shattered.

"The table," Carol said, just as blankly.

Maria leaned over and mouth pressed her very deeply, which she would've enjoyed way more if Talos' expression suddenly got very mischievous and he looked like he was about to laugh, and they parted and she said, "Just a table."

"By all means, don't let me interrupt you," Talos said in response to all of this, which prompted Maria to stick out her middle finger at him, which they had both learned was a silent way to deliver an expletive.

Carol, needing anywhere else to look because she hadn't yet learned how to stop the blood from flowing to her cheeks immensely whenever Maria did that, and saw that Soren hadn't moved at all.

"I'm still mad at you," Talos said, "but it would be worth speaking to her."

Carol sighed and looked down at the floor. "That was very wrong of me. I wasn't thinking. I have no excuse."

"Fine," Talos said, "but I'm still mad at you. It's duly noted. She's the one you've got to talk to. I forgive much easier."

"OK," Carol said, very badly wanting Maria to press her mouth against hers again but at the same time very much not wanting her to do that while anyone else was watching.

So she made do with a moment too long holding Maria's hand very tight, one of the few things in the universe that made this existence feel worth it during the moments where she didn't want to exist any longer, and got up to leave them to their game and overhearing them talking over the mechanics of sacrificing chess pieces to walk outside.

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As soon as she made it outside, Monica floated over to her with a very expectant look on her face, which could only result in Carol smiling very widely, because she couldn't help but be proud of her. Her hands in the SHIELD sweatshirt she was still wearing after all of this, she took them out long enough to give Monica a salute before she flew off, making sure not to fly higher than the trees so all their nosy Louisiana neighbors didn't catch a glimpse of her.
That left Soren to acknowledge her for the first time since storming out. She didn't look upset or mad anymore, just incredibly exhausted and very resigned. She motioned with a hand for Carol to move next to her and she did, very hesitantly.

After a few moments, she leaned her head on Carol's shoulder and her weight gave out and Carol had to fall on her ass with her so she could keep her steady against her shoulder. Soren did not cry, as Carol was expecting, but she did just stare out into the distance very blankly, with "the thousand yard stare," another one of Maria's odd expressions.

"I thought you were mad at me," Carol said, sounding very small and meek.

"I am," said Soren, "But I don't have the energy to express it. Very bad idea to be by myself out here. Shouldn't have isolated."

"I do that too often."

"We all do," Soren said, exasperated. "We can't just rely on each other and that Kree bastard," she nodded in the general direction of the Skrull ship, where Ruul was very heavily sedated inside, "took advantage of that."

Finally, she said, very weakly, "why do you hate us so much? Don't act like you don't. You're still afraid of us. After all we've done for you, after everything we've given you, you're still terrified we'll kill you in your sleep."

Carol sighed. "I spent six years looking for Mar-Vell's killer. I found Mar-Vell's killer, but they spent six years telling me it was you and I don't know how to let go of that."

"It's just not fair," Soren said, "This has been going on since before I was born. 'There are dirty Skrulls among you,' 'dirty green Skrulls with all the money, all the power, in hiding, waiting to take over.' I've spent my whole life hating myself. We all go through a phase where we spend all our energy transforming into anything else because we hate ourselves as much as they hate us, if not more so. Some Skrulls even permanently disguise as Kree and try to take us out too."

"I never met anyone like that."

"As if they'd want you to know," Soren said bitterly. "There's just enough of us that'll turn on us just to be pat on the head and to be told that they're one of the 'good ones,' I was told that too. We do such awful things to ourselves because we so badly want to be seen as beautiful, a lot of us die young staying transformed all the time."

"I'm sorry," was all that Carol could weakly say.

"Are you afraid of me right now?" Soren asked.

"No," Carol said.

"I don't repulse you?"

"Is Talos repulsed by you?" Carol asked.

"Part of our relationship is how repulsed we can be by our true form, so we've done everything we can to teach the Daughter differently so that she may love herself in a way that we don't. We don't want her transforming unless she absolutely has to. Not for leisure, like we did, not in the ways that'll shorten our life expectancy."
"Your daughter is beautiful," Carol said, meaning it.

"I know," said Soren. "She's choosing her name soon."

"How does that work?" Carol asked.

"Skrulls don't choose for their children like your kind does, they choose for themselves. They begin to get inklings of what they will be as adults and they begin to change to suit whatever is inside of them. Difficult to explain."

"I'm listening," Carol said, putting an arm around her and pulling her in a little tighter. This was very out-of-character for her, to initiate contact like this, considering how much she hated being touched by most people. Soren only smiled and snuggled in closer, briefly exchanging a smile with Talos through the open door.

"Sometimes a Daughter becomes a Son, a Son becomes a Daughter, or they're Something-In-Between, or Neither. You do not have a child as a Skrull expecting to end up with what you started out with. That's very important to us. She may be a Daughter now but she might decide differently."

Carol shrugged, moving Soren's head on her shoulder up and down, and the two laughed a little.

"I wish Terrans were like that."

"Terrans don't seem to get to naturally," Soren said sadly, "no offense, but they're often quite dumb."

Carol shrugged again. "Some of them are worth protecting."

"Indeed."

"Are you waiting for her?" Carol asked.

"Yes," Soren said, "she's arriving tonight. She's always been so different from the others, so often on her own, never talking with words but talking in other ways. I'm sorry you haven't gotten to know her better."

"She just takes her time, she's like me. We don't warm up to people fast." Carol said.

"You really don't," said Soren, "you're so locked away from people. You're lonely even when with others."

"Aren't we all?"

"That's the price of sentience. Loneliness might as well be the standard of sentience."

A light blinked in the sky, larger and brighter than an ordinary star, and Soren shot up to her feet in an instant, staring up at it. Carol slowly got to her feet as well, and even Monica stopped with her flying to put a hand over her eyes, squinting at the distant light.

The light got closer and closer and suddenly it seemed to vanish, the cloaking device on the Skrull ship approaching just barely visible to the trained eye, and Soren screamed with joy and began to run barefoot across the field at it, Carol following on foot, Monica touching down and waving the Skrull ship down.

It looked to be a little bit smaller than the one they possessed, so Carol had to assume it was a scouting ship of some kind, and once parked in a clump of trees, the entry ramp extended and the
Daughter came out, flanked by a couple of guards wielding melee weapons of some sort, who nodded respectfully in Carol and Monica's direction.

Mother and daughter reunited, Soren screaming with joy still and the Daughter saying nothing, but her joy was being projected out of her so that Carol and Monica could clearly feel it. The two put their foreheads together, experiencing a mind meld, passing through uninterrupted, both of them silently crying and smiling very widely, before the Daughter motioned silently for Carol to come closer.

Soren fell to the ground, hands over her mouth, weeping and sobbing, the two Skrull guards actually bowing in her direction and smiling widely at her, giving guttural roars the way Talos did when assembling them all together back on Mar-Vell's laboratory. Soren, hands still over her mouth, tears pouring out of her eyes, bowed back, practically laughing on top of the weeping.

The Daughter motioned again for Carol to get closer, and Carol did, hesitantly, and the Daughter motioned down and Carol took the signal to crouch down in a squat so their foreheads were level with one another. The Daughter smiled and pressed her forehead to Carol's, but it wasn't like when Soren had done it. There was no rush of emotion or another person's memories.

Rather:

*Carol. I'm so glad to talk to you.*

Carol sprang back and fell on her ass, and yelling out "holy shit!"

The Daughter just smiled.

"You can talk?"

The Daughter shrugged and motioned for her to come closer again. Carol did so, much more enthusiastically this time, and they pressed foreheads together once again and once again:

*I could not talk till now. I am different in that way, I suppose.*

And Carol heard herself saying as loudly as if she was talking aloud:

**I'm sorry I didn't get to talk to you earlier--holy shit, what is this?**

*No need to worry, Carol. It's just your inner voice communicating with mine. I've never gotten to hear it before, though I've gotten to hear your speaking voice, which, if I might add, is such a lovely voice.*

Monica said out loud, "What's going on?" and Carol raised a finger and waved it vaguely in her direction, not knowing how else to respond, too overwhelmed by this sudden development. Soren, somewhat composed, went over to Monica and told her that the Daughter had finally began her ascent into full maturity.

"But Skrull children talk, generally," Monica said. "Not that it's bad that you don't talk normally," she quickly said to the Daughter, "you're lovely the way you are, I was just confused."

Her forehead still against Carol's, the Daughter gave her a "one moment" hand gesture and turned back to concentrate.

*Not even my parents got to hear as much of this. I developed differently from other children, I suppose. That's why my mother is so emotional because she's only heard bits and pieces of my*
I see. Well, I'm glad to finally hear it. Are you an adult now?

Carol, for her part, was chuckling softly to herself, eyes clenched shut, smiling wide as her forehead rested against the Daughter's.

The Daughter chuckled audibly herself and said:

I'm beginning to become an adult. I will be maturing in the next few years, I believe. By then, I will have fully grown into the form I was meant to take all along. I might be changing somewhat so I hope you don't mind.

Of course not! Holy shit, please, god, whatever you are, I'm so immensely proud of you! I don't know the first thing about Skrulls or how you grow up but I'm glad you're doing that, at your own rate!

You're not normally so enthusiastic, so I appreciate that my growth makes you so.

So what do we do now?

I believe it's time to tell you my name, because I finally decided it on the way over here. Millions of lightyears of travel and lots of jump points gives you time to think. I could not decide till I stumbled on an old dialect and the phrase for it that means, 'Chosen Form.'

And that's your name?

Indeed it is.

The Daughter smiled wide at her, opened her mouth, and for several seconds, an awkward grunting noise came out of her mouth and Soren rushed over to her and said, "No, baby, you don't have to."

The Daughter reached over and touched Soren's forehead with her hand and said: I shan't be saying much after this, but I need to say this much before I go back to this form of communication. It's OK, mother. You've always told me I'm strong.

And then: Carol Danvers, I'm pleased to make your introduction, formally.

And then, each word softly whispered: "My. Name. Is. Yesereth."

And then: Pleasure to meet you.

Soren burst into tears again, wrapping her arms around Yesereth, holding her tight, as Talos and Maria came running out of the kitchen, Talos quickly saluting the two guards, and rushing over to his daughter.

Yesereth smiled and whispered, each word carefully and slowly, "My. Name. Is. Yesereth."

Talos yelled out, began laughing, and picked Yesereth up in his arms and danced around, giving out the guttural moan that clearly signified joy and celebration to any living being. "Yes, my love, yes! No need to say any more! I know how much effort that was for you and you've only ever got to say anything out loud only when you wish!"

Yesereth placed her head against her father's and they silently communicated for a little while, and
then he began screaming with joy and dancing around with her in his arms, yelling to the guards: "My child is almost grown! I lived to see this day! I lived to see this beautiful, wondrous child growing up!"

They groaned back in the Skrull tongue, but Carol roughly translated it to general affirmations and congratulations, wishing him and his child a long life with many moons upon the plains of Tarnax, and long health and prosperity to his whole family. He suddenly placed her down and ran over to Carol and lifted her up into his arms, causing her to unconsciously let out a squeal of surprise but laughing all the same, forgetting just how damn strong the Skrull was. "Carol, you dumb stupid bastard, it is clearly a sign of good luck that you got to be here the moment a Skrull enters maturity! One more against the tide! Ah ha ha ha!" He placed her down and did the same with Monica, who enjoyed it much more, and Maria flatly refused but still gave him a hug anyway.

Soren walked over to Carol and said quietly in her ear: "I'm still mad at you, but this is such a good omen. Let us set aside our differences for now so we can properly celebrate."

Carol smiled, too overtaken by the emotion of it all, smiling longer than she think she'd ever smiled before, despite all the odds that were about to face all of them, and only nodded in return.

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks to @wakandan_jedi for coming up with the name! That was mentioned many chapters ago and I'd already been planning on naming her and had no idea what it should be! So Yensereth it is!

The final roster of the Carol Corps: Carol, Maria, Monica, Fury, Talos, Soren, Yensereth and technically Frigga, though she's not gonna be joining us, unfortunately. People always whine and moan that Carol is too OP, but Frigga is definitely OP for sure! Fury won't be either, though that will be made clear as to why shortly.

I identified a lot with both Carol and the Skrulls in the movie, so this was kind of my opportunity to address that both in the narrative and to myself. I have been both Carol and Soren at times, many times. A lot of our worst enemies are right between our ears when we absorb what we hear and feel at such young ages.

We're starting to get to the endpoint of this lil yarn, and the outline has changed because I had some other ideas and I needed to write em down, so hopefully you enjoy!

Comments, suggestions, improvements, favorite Youtubers, down below!

- G
Chapter Summary

This might be the end for our heroes. They might be facing certain death. Nothing is certain to them. They've got a job to do anyway. When you've got the power to influence something just a little to protect people who can't protect themselves, maybe there's a chance within a chance to make it work and save some people.

Carol Danvers faces her destiny in the eyes and goes for it. And yet Zen-Pram, her enemy, seems to be expecting her every move. What could he possibly have planned? What is he really plotting?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Maria announced, once they were all back inside and the Skrull scouts had left with Ruul's body (making sure Monica didn't see), that she would honor the maturity of Yesereth, the day before a major battle, no less, by engaging in an honored Terran custom.

She was going to bake Yesereth a cake.

Monica had very shyly asked Yesereth if she could mind meld with her as well, and Yesereth had eagerly nodded and Monica giggled as soon as they did and said, "oh my god, that's what you sound like!" They had been roughly the same age once, but they still enjoyed getting to formally talk to each other. Something strange about Yesereth is that it was quickly discovered that she could engage in the mind meld just by touching someone with her hands, not just with foreheads like other Skrulls. It was abundant that she had some sort of psionic gift to go along with the rest of her quirks and was very well-spoken for her age. So now she could grab your hand and talk to you, though she quickly specified that she'd only be able to read the parts of their minds they gave her mental permission to see, which made Carol feel a lot more at ease with the whole thing.

It didn't matter, because everyone wanted to talk to Yesereth, and as much as she'd privately worried that everyone aside from her parents had seen her as nothing but an eccentric and mute child, she quickly discovered that they all viewed her as a highly intelligent individual and someone they all cared for deeply. One of the great benefits of being Yesereth is that she didn't have to try and read people because it came so easily to her (Carol even told her how jealous of that she was!)

The young Skrull did know there was a strange battle of sorts coming up, and her parents had already explained that she did not have to go, but she'd insisted. Damn the odds, she was going to help her parents fight this war! Not to mention that Carol could easily run away at any time, Maria and Monica could run away, and Mr. Fury only ran away because he was trying to protect this planet. What an admirable assembling of folks she'd gotten to be with, she privately observed, people who sacrificed themselves expecting nothing in return.

She did not know what to expect from this planet, but she distracted herself trying to help Maria and Carol bake the cake and mix all these fun Terran ingredients while her parents stared at her fondly from across the room and Monica continued practicing her flying outside.
It was by some great grace of luck or fate or God or whatever you call it that Yesereth's Maturity Day was largely uneventful. No disasters to speak of, at least not in that little pocket of space just outside of New Orleans. Nothing so significant that it required the attention of the two super-powered people in the residence.

It would be the last time for a while, if we're being honest.

Ruul's parting gift to the Rambeau residence had been a little drone of sorts, that could wander around and film and record anyone who might be present, transmitting the data millions of light years across space to him, so that he could look upon the person whose death would restore his lost honor, and those that would help bring his full plans to fruition. They had luckily not detected the drone earlier, it was of a sort that was was before the signature datapads and the older technology had been, for once, a major boon for him. Vers' death was one thing, but there was more. Always more to what he wanted. No limit to his ambition. Vers would not just deliver herself to him for killing, but hand him his greatest weapon yet.

Zen-Pram genuinely had nothing else planned as a surprise. Far be it from him to underestimate his enemy. They had all handled themselves against Ruul quite admirably. The Skrulls taking Ruul for themselves? Let them. There wasn't anything they'd learn that the Supreme Intelligence would mind them learning. Ruul worked very well as an individual but not so well as an army, and therefore it would be useless for their research. They'd get some nice charts and reading and insight into pre-assimilation Kree tech, but that was centuries ago, like teaching the Terran who loved their metal automobiles about the horse and buggy.

Zen-Pram did not hate the Skrulls like his protege had. He did not hate Carol Danvers, though he certainly disliked her enough, disliked her sentimentality and the fawning way she seemed to swoon over that other Terran. It was a weakness he already had exploited enough times, that all Ruul had to do was take their forms when they were separated and their neuroses would do the rest. He'd actually fully expected them to kill each other in a self-loathing panic and was quite surprised when none of them died. He had seen the old logs of tests with Ruul and having it infiltrate Skrull camps centuries older and gradually get the entire camp to turn on each other. The fact that it could partially but not perfectly replicate their sole evolutionary advantage had always irked the Supreme Intelligence.

It did, of course, surprise him that even as a former Kree, Vers was quite young. Around a quarter of the way through a typical Terran lifespan, give or take a few years, but with the added Kree blood in her veins, Yon-Rogg's blood, a proper Kree could live for centuries if not killed in battle. He was one of the very rare older Kree out there. Once exposed to the blue blood, taken from the Supreme Intelligence's central structure itself, your cells did not decay nearly as quickly, you lived much longer and aged much slower. How that strange Xorrian artifact she'd gotten herself exposed to might factor in, that he did not know. He had never heard of a living being being exposed to Xorrian tech before.

Zen-Pram's plan hadn't been nearly as complicated as one might've expect from a shrewd and strategically minded one such as he. The simplest plans were often best. While he'd very much wanted to fight Vers at her peak, the mission allowed no chance of failure, not with all that lost honor at stake. She'd have to be weakened, and weaken her he had, even as he increased the efficiency of the force he had gathered and assembled, something he'd done for generations. Intentionally take those members of a fighting force most likely to rebel or not strong enough to survive harsh conditions, and push them to their limits. Tir-Zar and Zyro were more than likely at least tentatively allied with the Terrans now, believing themselves able to get revenge. They had
bristled against his leadership from the start, wanted to be coddled, didn't want to be soldiers, so they had to go. Roco-Bai had been a fine warrior but refused to obey orders, loved his killing, loved his sadism, and he actually served as a microcosm of how Zen-Pram liked to wage war.

When dealing with Xandarian politicians, you find their weaknesses and ever so slightly exploit them. With one such as Vers, the thing to exploit was her exposure to the Xorrian artifact, her Kree combat training, her tenacity. So he employed the death of a thousand cuts, each assailant thrown her way weakening her a little more, forcing her to push herself, and then not giving her enough time to recover, over and over and over and over, so that when they met, finally, formally, he would break her quite easily. He would not toy with his prey like Roco-Bai had enjoyed doing, he was looking for a quick and fast death. This one had a knack of snatching victory from the jaws of defeat, he would not underestimate her like Yon-Rogg had.

Despite his distaste for Vers' sentimental streak, her care and concern for others, the clear affection she showed in particular for those other two Terrans, one of whom she seemed to have taken on as a mate, the one-eyed man she seemed to regard as an older sibling, the three Skrulls she seemed to enjoy spending time with, despite all that...Zen-Pram could admire her, and understand why Yon-Rogg had been so eager to take her on as his ward. Her fights with Roco-Bai and Ruul, some of the most dangerous beings the Supreme Intelligence had ever spawned, showed what a proficient fighter she was. She was quick and adapted quickly, showed a flair for improvisation and could face extreme emotional distress and make it through intact.

He watched the Terrans and the Skrulls make some sort of Terran dish, eating it together, laughing and talking excitedly, and he began to softly squeeze the newest attachment to his own Kree suit, the bronze colored exoskeleton bracing his body. Attached to that, on his left arm, was the gauntlet En-Vad and Phae-Dor had made for him, and in the center of the top part of the hand rested the swirling reddish black mass that was the Aether.

If Vers got to use a Xorrian artifact, than he would as well. Fight fire with fire.

He gave an order over the intercom:

"Engage."

The planet before him seemed to almost shudder as a tidal wave of spacecraft belonging to the Kree appeared from jump points in one direction, and ships most of the Kree soldiers had never seen before emerged from the other direction.

A deep voice boomed over the intercom:

"I want an exact count of the population. No mistakes."

"What for?" The perpetually clueless voice of En-Vad rang out from the front of the bridge.

"It will be divided in half. The remaining half, you can do with what you will. But half of them must perish."

Devros, always off to the side near his former pupil, just chuckled. "This guy is really fucking weird," he said to Zen-Pram.

There was only one thing left to be done now. That would be to send a particular notice through the datapads of every Kree associated with the mission, and announce their presence.
This included Tir-Zar and Zyro, who were currently getting acquainted with the Terran custom identified only as "pad thai" with a somewhat bemused Fury looking on. It certainly ruined the stir-fried noodles for them.

The notice read, in the Kree tongue: "We have engaged."

And then a nice little viewpoint from one of the cameras on the Helion, as the orbital bombardment began, even from such a distance away, one could see buildings beginning to collapse and denizens of the buildings beginning to run.

They had been keeping track of that one college laboratory in Virginia, and the situation was escalating, and as much as Fury really felt as though he could use Carol's help for that one, he had to make the tougher call.

He pulled out the beeper she had designed for him, her Carol Call, as Monica had jokingly described it, and hit the button.

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Carol woke up with a start. Maria's arm was around her in the bed, and she was holding onto her softly from behind, and a much more selfish Carol would've stayed like that forever. The beeper was going off, the symbol she had designed for herself glowing and growing repeatedly, and she reluctantly pulled herself out of Maria's embrace to go check on it.

A message flashed across the screen: CHECK YOUR DATAPAD

She did so, yawning and heading towards the Kree suit, which had been washed and ironed, folded up nicely on the chair, and thank every god that could exist that the datapad was waterproof. She clicked it on, throwing a smile back in Maria's direction, but the smile did not last for long. A hand slowly went to her mouth as she realized all at once that she had been suckered. They had known all along that they'd been keeping track of them.

She contacted Khn'nr through the beeper, and he was in a sheer panic. Every one of the Skrull scout ships on his end had suddenly vanished off their monitors on Tarnax. They were all gone. Maybe a few dozen had been sent and they were all gone.

"We don't have enough, but we will spare whatever we can," Khn'nr vowed.

"No," said Carol, "You're all staying there." She clicked off the beeper, not wanting to be rude, but also having to decide very quickly what she was going to do next. Every second she wasted, more of them would die. Even if she intervened, she knew that she could not take out billions of Kree and whoever else they'd brought with them. One against billions. But she could still try. She could still go out in a blaze of glory, she could at least prove she wasn't one of them anymore, that she would sacrifice herself if she had to--

Maria wasn't in the bed anymore.

Carol turned quickly, photon blast out, ready to blast to smithereens whoever dared hurt her, but Maria just stood in the bathroom, brushing her teeth. In her reverie, she hadn't noticed her moving.

"You should brush your teeth," Maria said, somewhat muffled from the plastic bristles in her mouth.

"Why?" Carol said, lowering her outstretched hands, the photon glow reducing to nothing.
"It's time to go."

"Maria, it's not scouts. It's everyone. We were tricked. They're all there now."

"I saw," Maria said, voice still muffled, and continued brushing. Carol just stared at her for a while. Partially it was an excuse to stare, but partially because she wasn't sure why Maria looked so calm about all of this. What if Ruul had somehow escaped and had turned back into her again? So she went over to very awkwardly put an arm around her, her hand touching her shoulder, and the skin did not change at all, so that meant either Ruul had gotten better at it or it was really her--

"I have a plan, actually," Maria said, laughing a little at Carol's very tentative attempts at being affectionate.

"You do?"

"Yes," said Maria, "This whole Kree thing is about assimilation, right? Getting new stock to bolster their forces and so on."

"Like your military."

"Ouch, you were a part of it too, once," Maria said, "But the difference is that honor is like a sort of currency to them, right?"

"More or less. I never bothered with it."

"And we know which of them is in charge. So we find that one, we take him out, and the rest, as his little drones, have to obey. That's why Yon-Rogg couldn't stop you way back when. So we do the same to this guy--"

"Zen-Pram."

"Yeah, him. We just need him."

Carol stopped and thought about this. If Yon-Rogg had ever been compromised while she was under his command, they really wouldn't have been able to react at all. The Kree had nothing without their command. And if Zen-Pram had made himself in charge of this operation than his word was practically law and then--

"That could work," Carol said, hope entering her tone for the first time in a while. "You're a genius."

Maria just smiled and washed out her mouth and offered Carol her own toothbrush. She'd rather grown to like brushing the bristles against her teeth, though with her Kree biology, she didn't really need to. She did so anyway, both because it was enjoyable and because she liked the way Maria looked at her when she did so.

"I'm sorry I'm not so affectionate sometimes," she said quietly, her mouth muffled now.

Maria shrugged. "You're plenty affectionate, you just think too much. It's those rare moments when you're not inside your own head that you're the most affectionate with me."

Carol smiled to herself at this and finished brushing. There was a war going on and she was brushing her teeth and fulfilling the basic hygienic needs of Terrans, to which a thought came to mind and she said--
"We need to go. Dammit. We need to go. I'm not ready for this. And if I try to go by myself, you'll just sneak off and find me anyway."

"Yes I will," Maria said, still smiling.

"And you're not afraid?"

"I'm plenty afraid," Maria said. "If Monica stayed, I would stay too. But Monica will insist on going and I can't stop her anymore. You're going to go no matter what and I can't stop you. Talos and Soren and Yesereth are going to go, and I can't convince them to go back to their home planet, which I'd love to visit someday. I've never even been to another planet before. You would always say that you preferred the view from up there."

"Much more peaceful," Carol said, reaching out with tendrils of photon energy and beginning to draw the pieces of the Kree suit towards herself, but also bathing Maria in it so she could get a little more warm.

"You know, you could probably kill a person if you hit them hard enough with that, and it is the most pleasant goddamn feeling in the world to me whenever you use it." Maria said.

"I have," Carol said, "but not intentionally."

The Kree suit clicked into place around her. She could not tell if this would be the last time she would ever wear it.

"They'll know we're coming, and they've got a trap set up for us." Carol said.

"Yes," Maria said again, poking one of the gloves as it came floating by. All of it was on now, she flexed and moved around in place a little to make sure all movement was there. It seemed to be.

"You still don't have to go." Carol said.

"If my daughter and the woman I'm in love with go, I go," she said, and she walked over and pressed her mouth against Carol's briefly, and once again she had the briefest of impulses to just do that forever and other things besides, but they both sort of realized such a distraction would be literally deadly millions of lightyears away and separated.

"We might die out there," Maria said, "so I want my last memory of you to be a pleasant one. Are you sure you can't stay? It is going to be us against billions."

"Maria," Carol said, "I could never sleep at night if I did nothing," and it was clear Maria felt the same, as she walked to the closet of the room and began fiddling with something, and Carol almost laughed, as it was bits and pieces of battered Kree armor and weapons that she recognized as having belonged to Starforce six years earlier. She must've stolen it all off their corpses.

"Help me get this on, babe," Maria said, "I don't get to fly like you do."

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Six people. Three Terrans, three Skrulls, entered the Skrull ship. All six of them knew it was likely they would die, but the six knew there was an opportunity to deal a major blow to their worst enemy. Even if it was a trap, it was a trap worth setting off if they could rub it in the Supreme Intelligence's face. There had never been an organized resistance to the Kree, even the Skrulls hadn't really tried to fight so much as try and hold back the line as the rest ran.
It lifted off, Talos and Soren at the controls and the other four strapped in. Maria had procured a whole bunch of Kree weapons, Talos and Soren and now Yesereth had on their battle armor and their own guns. They had as much defense as they would get.

The jump point emerged over the Rambeau household, and Monica grabbed Carol's hand with one and Maria's with the other, and gripped them both very tightly, but still looking determined.

"You sure about this, Lieutenant Trouble?" Carol asked. "No one would call you a coward if you wanted to stay."

"My family doesn't run," Monica said with so much precocious determination that despite how corny of a line that was, Carol couldn't help but smile and gave her hand a loving squeeze. Yesereth, from behind them, reached out with her hands and all of them heard what she was saying right after that.

*We have a war to win, one way or another.*

They went through the jump point, and the Rambeau family became the first human beings to ever leave the Solar System.

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter today, been struggling with personal stuff and job stuff and just general stuff. This has been a very necessary outlet while I try to figure everything out. I really do want to write an essay or make a video or *something* about why this movie means so much to me, I'll figure that out.

Carol and Maria kinda reflects myself a little bit. I'm a very closed off person emotionally. So I identify with them both a lot. I identify with Talos and Soren and Fury and Yesereth and *all* of them a lot. Hope you do too.

Here we go. Few more twists and turns till we get there. Enjoy the ride.

- G
Arrival at Zen-Whoberi

Chapter Summary

Carol and company have sprung the trap, the entire fighting force of Zen-Pram raining down upon them. They have very little backup and very little time. The odds are heavily against them. The situation seems hopeless. All they can hope to do is find and disable Zen-Pram himself, the only chance they have at saving the planet from the Kree, and perhaps a chance to save all planets from the Kree. But there seems to be additional troops Carol has never seen before, and what of their leader? Who could this newcomer be?

But is this what Zen-Pram has wanted all along? The Kree commander is a crafty sort.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Carnage.

That was to be expected.

It only intensified the second they made their way through the jump point. The bad news was that both the Krees and their visitors, strange looking ships, along with...flying worms? The ships targeted them immediately, all of them, though it was unclear if these ships were manned or not, and Talos and Soren worked in unison to dip and dive and weave all around, dodging arrays of blaster fire with precision, Carol reaching out with the photon energy, ready to absorb any blasts. She saw Monica next to her trying to do the same.

That was the bad news.

The good news was that suddenly a wave of different blaster fire came down from the heavens, blasting away some of their closest assailants, and the Skrulls let out a cheer for a small wave of their comrades had arrived as well. Talos and Soren and Yesereth all let out guttural moans of victory into the intercom, and it was a chorus of the same sounds that greeted them in return.

And then nothing, nothing but the vacuum of space, because everything happened at once. A blast directly to the windows, which didn't shatter but did crack, sending the ship into a spiral, neither of them able to control the ship any longer. Yesereth yelling out in horror as the round in question sprouted something and another blast shook the interior of the ship, some sort of flashbang device of some sort, and both Talos and Soren slumped over bloodied in their seats at once. The mask came over up Carol's face as she yelled out a silent roar of rage, bursting through the seat belt to take just enough time to seal the breach before jumping out of the entry ramp, hearing the muffled sounds of photon energy that could even be heard in space as Monica followed. She had never flown in space before, but she had enough sense to put it up over her mouth so she could breathe.

As the two of them floated away from the ship, the windshield fell away to reveal a secondary one, a smaller one primed for defense, with enough of a view that Carol could see Maria delicately taking the Skrulls out of their seats, placing them on the floor, and getting into the pilot's chair herself with Yesereth as co-pilot. Maria blew a kiss in Carol's direction, then pointed.
They both turned to see Kree ships headed their way. They had no time to try and explain a plan except for Carol motioning for Monica to follow, and the yellow and blue energies of their photon fields intensified as they flew directly into the stream, Monica's further shielding Carol's, and they both silently yelled out a roar of their own as ship after ship were blown completely through.

Carol knew from the last time she tried this that she had maybe a few minutes at best before she'd get to a point where she'd have to power down from her "binary state," as Talos had always jokingly put it. What helped were the remaining Skrull ships, led by Maria, following close behind and covering the perimeter, in a tightly packed formation, some flying in reverse and some sideways so that every place they could be attacked was covered, a labyrinth of laser blasts taking out everything in sight.

It would not be enough by itself to destroy the thousands of ships currently above Zen-Whoberi, but it would cut them a clear path to the planet itself. Zen-Pram would not be standing around like an Accuser would (Carol internally wondered if that slimy worm Ronan had been brought along, but she was surprised to discover that no Accuser ships had joined them). He would be on the planet itself, indulging himself like all true Kree commanders did, he would be directly in the fray. There, Carol would challenge him, and if beaten, then the Kree would have to abandon their efforts. It was the only hope, and they both knew it.

Thank goodness Maria had practiced with Skrull ships in the interim, she flew like a demon possessed, every few seconds lining up a Kree ship in her crosshairs, covering Carol and Monica so they wouldn't expend energy as fast. Yesereth seemed to be deeply concentrating, but then Maria would have pinpoint accuracy and hit a Kree ship and never miss, and in the brief moment Carol turned back to look, it seemed as though she might be psychically detected exactly where they were and melding minds with hers.

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Yesereth reached out farther than she ever had before. She had talked to many Terran animals and plants (she had spoken quite a bit to Goose, and liked her quite a bit), she had spoken to the essence of materials like rock and brick and stone, but now she was reaching out as far as she could to as many of the Kree and the ships and the vacuum of space itself, letting her mind wander, contacting everything. She could not control what they did, but she could at least ask politely.

Will this hurt you?

It shall not, for I am metal and feel no pain, and do not want to cause pain.

And a Kree ship would suddenly veer into Maria's crosshairs and take a hit that would instantly kill its pilot. The Kree did not seem willing to communicate, and Yesereth did not like murder, but for the safety of Carol and Monica and all those on the planet, necessary.

It was almost as if the ship wanted to be there, and it took very little energy to ask as opposed to forcing, as she had learned very on with her powers to communicate with almost anything in some way. This reach did not extend out more than a few hundred feet in any given direction, but it's all she needed. She could communicate with the other Skrull pilots and work as a collective, but unlike the Kree, the collective was explicitly consented to and only temporary.

So it was that a huge mass of about fifty Skrull ships and two superpowered Terrans tore a pretty continuous line through the Kree ships, but their commander needed to be found. That would end all this, thousands were already on the planet, and thousands more arrived every second, and many of the citizens of Zen-Whoberi had already died. Yesereth could hear them, hearing the screams and the rage and the fear, and it seemed to strengthen her resolve.
She melded more with Maria, her hand on hers, and Maria let her in. Gave explicit mental permission, and Yesereth could feel what drove her, the immense care and affection and love she felt for the two women flying in front of their little procession, the anger that would come if either of them came to any harm, and her aim was true. Shot after shot after shot, Kree after Kree after Kree.

Even before such a day as this, Maria Rambeau had been a pilot to be feared. Carol Danvers had struggled immensely in training and in her career, despite her raw ability, but her fiery rage and gumption had always been contrasted by Maria's cold and calculated approach to combat that made her a demon to deal with. The Air Force had been quite terrified of how well she flew, how Carol would take insanely risky moves that would almost kill her and barely make it, and Maria flew in a plane like a marathon runner ran.

Augmented by Yesereth, Maria Rambeau became the most dangerous thing to fly a plane in the night sky.

The fighting on the planet's surface, inside its capital city no less, briefly lessened so that all parties could observe how hundreds of Kree ships were suddenly exploding in a straight line headed towards the planet. The yellow energy he'd become familiar with was in a straight line, with thousands of little lines all around it, but it was accompanied by a radiant blue as well.

Zen-Pram looked up from his perch, having just driven his energy spear through the chest of a local soldier, and smiled very softly before pulling the spear out from the chest cavity and shoving it through the throat of another attacking warrior.

He knew what he was looking for as far as assimilation went. Neither of these two stood a chance. Not worthy.

A voice boomed in his ear: "Should I be worried?"

"Not at all," Zen-Pram said calmly, turning to shove the spear inside a third assailant. "We've prepared for this."

"As have I. A couple of my Children ought to do the trick."

Why did he have to call them Children, Zen-Pram scoffed to himself. What a ridiculous notion, assigning emotional resonance to things you used only for killing. Suggesting the weaknesses of cohabitation. As a joke?

"Supergiant. Black Swan. Coven. Deal with the intruders."

Zen-Pram would've scoffed again at this, but he'd had just enough time to get to know these ones to not dare do so audibly. Two beings that appeared to be women stepped forth from growing portals next to him, along with three additional women, all wearing similarly diseased looking suits of armor. The three that seemed attached at the hip were one feral entity, and the other two gave Zen-Pram a respectful nod before staring off into the distance. Zen-Pram had to look around and wonder why he wasn't being attacked any longer, only to see a small legion of Zen-Whoberians stabbing themselves repeatedly with their weapons and falling to the ground.

The one called Supergiant was certainly quite tall, taller than Zen-Pram himself, but by no means a giant. Wisps of energy seemed to float from each new corpse and make their way to her, and she reached out and sighed happily as all those wisps entered her forehead and she seemed to glow a
faint shade of blue. The blue face of what appeared to be a Centaurian, white hooded armor, ceremonial tattoos all over her and glowing white eyes with no pupils.

She turned to Zen-Pram and said, " Barely a collective meal between all of them, I'm afraid. I shall hope that the interlopers will be much more refreshing."

Zen-Pram, feeling outclassed for the first time, only gave a hesitant nod in response. Snapping back to attention, he spoke into his own datapad and called for Kleaner. They might as well get some help from someone who would prove quite useful.

The feral Kree being sprinted into view on all fours, blood clearly visibly on her mouth, teeth bared, roaring an inhuman roar and screeching to a stop right in front of him.

"Join them," said Zen-Pram.

Kleaner looked to them and scuttled over to their side like a good pet would. He and Devros would be joining them shortly enough, and Kleaner had no capability of any mental thought of her own. She could easily be killed, but not before she'd inflict some serious damage on who he wanted to damage the most.

Aside from Devros himself, Kleaner was the one he didn't really want to lose. An unthinking, unfeeling creature such as her was quite useful as she always obeyed without question. But the game he was playing was rather similar to that Terran game he'd briefly gotten to play called chess, you had to sacrifice some pieces to steer your enemies into the desired position. Everyone so far, Roco-Bai and Leigh Marshall and Tir-Zar and Zyro, all of them had been sacrificed in one way or another.

Speaking of the two grunts, they had one more thing to do on C-53. After all, he'd been watching for shuttle trajectories off of Hala, and their last assignment was to take care of one more loose end considering where the loose end went.

Zen-Pram's next fuck up. Not realizing that an Asgardian goddess was also in the Atlanta branch of SHIELD at the same time as those two Kree trainees of his. This is actually a fuck up that Zen-Pram would never get to learn about. It was a fuck up that Nicholas J. Fury learned about as he awoke to scuffles from the private medical room that Una had been housed, loud screaming noises that could only be heard by his office, and rushed in gun drawn to see a few things.

1. Una in her bed, attached to numerous IVs, eyes wide.

2. Frigga right next to the bed, smiling very widely.

3. Tir-Zar and Zyro on the ground, two Asgardian spears through each of their guts, holding energy daggers.

Fury looked between the two Kree on the ground to the one in the bed, then to Frigga, then back again, then sighed and put the gun away in its holster and entered the room, looking very sadly at both of them.

"We like you," Tir-Zar choked out, "but orders are orders."

"There were once some Terrans who followed orders," Fury said with no emotion in his voice.
"They followed orders no matter who told them so and thought that excused them. You ever get a
next life as a Terran, I'd look up a place called Auschwitz and read up on it."

Several seconds of gagging noises from the two on the ground and hyperventilating from the one
in the bed, and Frigga softly taking Una's hand in hers and squeezing it gently. The two looked up
at Fury with pleading eyes.

"Please. It didn't enter anywhere immediately fatal," Zyro said, "we helped you. We like you. Help
us now. You don't know her. You don't know what kind of traitor she is to our people. Your kind
doesn't like traitors either."

A brief scan of the entry of the spears suggested they were right. Frigga had not gone for
immediately mortal wounds. Her aim was literally perfect, but she was a goddess. Where she'd
been keeping the spears was anyone's guess.

Fury just smiled and said, "No," and leaned against the doorframe, arms folded, smiling at them.
He did not stop smiling at them, neither did Frigga, they just kept smiling as seconds went by and
then became a few minutes and the two on the ground had to watch the life slowly drain away
from them, going to the last second pleading and begging weaker and weaker, until there was
nothing left.

"That's a lot of blood," Fury said.

"Indeed," said Frigga, "you'd better grab a mop."

Fury laughed, but he did so. Took him a few minutes, but he found one. The Director of SHIELD
and the goddess swept up the blood as Frigga slowly disintegrated it with beams of light from her
hands, which Fury was too numb to question.

Stripped of their uniforms, they were sent immediately for autopsies and also the first opportunity
to study Kree flesh up close. The uniforms remained, with the puncture wounds (and Frigga had
retracted the spears into compact cylinders, explaining the unanswered question Fury had had), and
looked through the datapads as best they could to see if there was anything else they could
ascertain.

"Zen-Whoberi?" Frigga asked.

"I suppose," Fury said. "Would be real nice if you could spare some of yours, being gods and all."

"Not my husband or my sons. But there are those who are supposed to get artifacts back. I suppose
if I told them that an anonymous source had told me where the Aether was, they'd be willing to
help. It won't be a lot. But that's all I can spare."

"I admire you quite a bit, and you are a goddess and all. But I care about the people on that ship
more than I'm afraid of you, and I will very futilely try to end your life if anything happens to
them."

"I quite like them too," Frigga said, but her face fell. "I know a lot of what I should not know, but I
unfortunately don't know how all of this turns out. Perhaps I was meant to take part in some small
way. I cannot predict what happens for a while."

"I don't understand," Fury said.

"One day, a long time from now, you will," Frigga said. And then a flash of rainbow light, and then
nothing.
Fury and Una were left alone now. The two hadn't said much to each other. He did not move, but he did regard her somewhat suspiciously as she lay quietly in the bed he'd provided.

"So why do they want you dead so bad?" Fury asked.

"Well," Una said, "I'm sure they didn't know why. I did some digging of my own."

"About?"

"About the Xorrian artifacts. The race of beings that more than likely created all of us."

"We have a myth here that aliens from outer space created us. Not the prevailing myth, mind you. You've got Jesus and Muhammad and Buddha and many others besides, and there's billions that believe it's truth and it's not my job to question it. But one of the myths that isn't also considered religion is that aliens from outer space gave us the gift of sentience."

"They did. They did not create you any more than they created us. They took what was there and gave it a push, as you say. They used you as the proving grounds for sentient life in the known galaxy. We know not what they look like. All we have left are the artifacts and the ruins on the only two planets that belonged only to them. We don't know why they vanished. But they did have a safeguard placed in each artifact in order to protect them from being tampered with."

"What's that?"

"There is an instance, on your planet, of a man trying to touch a Xorrian artifact with his bare skin."

"Who are you referring to?"

"Many years ago, the Terran feared by your country that many years ago. Red man."

"Oh," and Fury knew exactly who she was talking about, Madam Carter had made full sure they knew all about Johann Schmidt. "Yeah, I've heard that story too."

"What happened to the Red man with the funny face was what seems to happen to everyone. It does something to you, he vanished and was never seen. We know not what happens or where they go if they do. But it displaces everything around it, destroys everything, it is how your plane with strong man crashed in ice."

"I don't see how this is relevant."

"Oh, you should, Fury Nick. Anything around it displaced, destroyed, if not attuned to it. Only a very powerful being can resist the safeguard which is why that," she motioned to Goose now curling around Fury's legs, "can touch it and even eat it."

"And that's why Carol could touch the Tesseract, why Monica can touch it."

"Yes," said Una, "they have become attuned to it. But only that one. Touch any of the others, without attunement, and the same thing would happen to them that happened to Red man in great war, for instance. I suspect death. Fate worse than death, even."

Fury's mind began to unconsciously search, and then he found his own answer. "And let's say somewhat without attunement were to intentionally activate it near something physical, a Supreme Intelligence perhaps--"
"It is resistant to all except that. Zen-Pram wants all of this to happen. It is not just trap for your friend Vers--"

"Carol," Fury said forcefully.

"Cah-rell," Una said with a little smile, "it is trap for Supreme Intelligence itself, I believe. But he cannot do it himself, it will kill him if he does it himself. But perhaps one attuned to one and not another could resist just long enough--"

Fury's hand went to his mouth and he nearly slumped down against the door, Goose meowing with concern. If not for Una already being badly injured and heavily sedated, she would've reacted herself.

"I'm a goddamn fool," Fury said quietly, "I let her go off and chase that maniac and he wants her all along. Kept on sending people after her, kept on wearing her down, till she's at her weakest, till he can take advantage--"

"And if she not work," Una said forcefully, "there's always another."

Fury just nodded softly. Both of them were in danger. A whole planet being callously sacrificed so that one Kree could try to kill the very thing controlling it, maybe even become the next Supreme Intelligence himself. A dangerous artificial intelligence was one thing, but what if that same magnitude was applied to something with sentient intelligence--

"Everything assimilated. Everything under his will. He is fool. Even had his scientist cronies En-Vad and Phae-Dor build him a way to refine and attune himself to that artifact that he has gotten by now," Una said quietly, "but it is not perfect, and it is slowly getting to him, and I suspect there are other concerned parties out there who would want want his scientists have built for him, to modify it to their own ends. Attunement with one Xorrian artifact is bad enough, but attunement with several?" She slumped back into bed, breathing heavily, wincing from her injuries.

"What does that mean?" Fury asked.

"Well," Una said weakly, "Texts suggest Xorrians destroyed themselves because no sentient can comprehend the power to alter time and space and reality itself. Imagine sentient mind controlling all of space and time at once."


Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click. Click.

It should be said now that if perhaps the assassination attempt had occurred several hours earlier, and every other event that followed had gone exactly the same way, Fury could've gotten in contact with her.

"It's going to be a while," Fury said softly to himself, not wanting to think about how long a while might be, knowing that in the morning he'd have to make some arrangements just in case, but for now slumping down against the door frame and holding Goose tight, the one remaining eye the flerken hadn't scratched out softly letting out tears all over her fur.

He had failed her again. He would not fail the rest of the planet. He would find who he needed, and soon, so he wouldn't have to keep relying on her to fix his messes for him. He would never again lean on her and hurt her the way he'd been hurting her for so long.
His fist came down on the floor, his thick combat gloves protecting his hands. He slammed it down again. And again. And again. As hard as he could, even as his gloves prevented any serious injuries. A moan grew deep in his throat and built itself up to impotent rage, because the only people who meant anything to him aside from his dear old mother in Huntsville, Alabama were now trapped there, exactly where that Kree bastard wanted them, and he couldn't do anything about it.

Nicholas Joseph Fury, Director of SHIELD, was helpless.

He screamed and he screamed and he screamed and he was quite lucky his offices had been soundproofed and none but Goose and Una had to hear it. The former simply nuzzled up against him sadly and the latter just looked at him with a blank expression. There was no more they could do. They could only sit back and wait, and in Fury's case, scream till he couldn't scream no more, panicking worse than he ever had on the floor, Una having no idea how to help him.

Una observed that despite the comparative power this Fury Nick wielded on his home planet now, he had been humbled in a way that the majority of this planet's leaders needed to be humbled. A true leader sees the true scope of the universe and realizes no amount of power will ever make you stronger than the universe itself, that order is nothing compared to chaos, creation nothing compared to destruction, empathy nothing compared to entropy.

You do so anyway, which was the last thing Mar-Vell had ever said to her all those years ago. She had asked Mar-Vell all of that before she snuck away and she feigned ignorance to the Supreme Intelligence. She had not understood then. She had not understood those secret correspondences, missing her so dearly, and seeing the way Mar-Vell, in her new guise as Dr. Wendy Lawson, had fixated in particular upon two women that were fresh from "basic training" and had both barely made it through, opposed and harassed at every turn by the boorish Terrans that they shared a species with. It had been laughable to many to hire two women so young to test experimental planes in the middle of the California desert. They were both barely out of their teenage years then. It had been the opportunity to end all opportunities for them, they both knew it, even if the pay had been pitiful.

She had asked then what two measly Terrans could possibly mean to her. They certainly seemed pleasant enough, though they had never talked, obviously, at least not without Mar-Vell there. She had renamed herself Uma ("Like Uma Thurman!" the one called Maria Rambeau had yelled out enthusiastically), and she had posed as a sick friend of Dr. Lawson's she'd kept up with from time to time. Neither of them had remembered her almost two decades later, but she hadn't been offended. They had not talked often enough to make a true impression. At every opportunity she had asked Mar-Vell why these two younglings, why them?

"This planet really values what's up here," Mar-Vell said, wearing that flight suit that made her look so distinguished, poking her own forehead. "They value family connections and money and wealth and influence and cold hard logic."

"Yes, that is how you determine value," Una had said, for it was how the Kree did things too, these Terrans weren't as collectively foolish as they looked.

"You're not getting it, love," Mar-Vell said, insisting in talking in one of the languages of the Terrans, which Una always struggled with even with the translator. "It ensures nothing but people taking advantage of each other. People consuming instead of creating. I can't stand that shit. This planet sickens me. But every now and again, you meet those individuals that remind you why every planet is worth saving."
"Like those Skrull traitors," Una had said angrily, still completely baffled by how Mar-Vell, her love, could ever turn on her own people like this.

"You should meet them. I hope you get to someday. The first two I met were in love. Still are in love. They're up on my laboratory, which I can't tell you about in case this is being tracked. They're called Talos and Soren, and she's pregnant with his child, and I met them with my gun drawn and aimed at them. We were trapped together, just the three of us, and I had been badly hurt. But they healed me, they helped me recover, we explained our differences, we had nothing else to do. I began to see how the system we had been raised in was hurting us almost as much as it was hurting them and everyone we assimilate."

"How does it hurt us?"

"It makes us repress our most basic instincts. Two people who would have gained more by killing me helped me. It is so unlike everything I know. I am not used to being helped expecting nothing in return. They did that for me. They were kind to me. Sure, there are Skrulls out there with ill intent. But no individual is a representation of the whole, love. We are so much more than these boxes they put us in. I don't know how to explain it."

"So why them? Why the two Terrans? Why did you pick them over me? I could've piloted the planes! I could've learned! I could pass for one of them!"

"I barely made it out of Hala with my life. I was not going to let the same happen to you. Why them? Because they're two Terrans who have spent their entire lives being screwed over and hurt and beaten and tortured and treated in every awful way a person can be treated. Sometimes a person who has been through that much can themselves become the perpetrator of great harm to others. But they had each other, they had one person who treated them kindly when no one else did, and that makes all the difference in the world. An act of empathy at the right time, something truly for someone else without anything for yourself, and I had accepted Rambeau because she's an expert and she's top of her class, as much as those chauvinists hated it. She worked ten times as hard for the same glory as the others."

"Fine, then why the other one?"

"Why Danvers? Because Rambeau insisted. Rambeau said she wouldn't join without her. Pegasus wanted a prodigy like her so bad they also took in the soldier who got on every instructor's nerves and was constantly fighting with everyone else. But Rambeau insisted. She put her whole career on the line when she had every opportunity to screw her over. And do you know what Danvers did? She refused! She laughed off the entire thing, she would forge her own path, but not before reading through every one of the documents when the brass wasn't looking and discovering the pay differences between Rambeau and every other pilot at her level. She threatened to make the entire thing public if she wasn't paid the same. The brass threatened to court martial her and that Terran girl, still practically a child, stood up right there in the room and told them to do her worst, and that she would rather die than let her best friend get screwed over. They laughed in her face and told her she'd just committed a felony."

"That makes no sense! They both could've ruined everything! They were not selfish! They did a thing that got them no material benefit!"

"Well, it came down to me. I told them all to fuck off. Madam Carter was already aware of who I really am and she needed me too much. They all need me too much, they can't rely on that fool Stark for anything anymore, him or his prodigy child. I'm all they have left. Before that day, I would've told those two children who dared stand up to such high authority to piss off, but something snapped and I heard myself saying that not only would Rambeau get the same pay, but
Danvers would too, and they'd both hold the same rank, and they'd be exclusively under my jurisdiction. Madam Carter made the call.

"You should tell me more about that one sometime."

"Soon enough, love. I could've done such awful things to them. It was so childish, so sentimental, so...irrational! But those two Terrans were willing to burn themselves to the ground for each other. I've never seen anything like it. I needed those two children to work with me. I needed to see the individuals instead of the statistics, to realize that individuals are what we're saving, not statistics. And since they've been working for me, they've been perfect candidates. The brass have no idea why they've suddenly improved so much, but perhaps treating them like people has something to do with it."

"I don't understand. It makes no sense. It gives no material value or honor or anything to yourself."

"I know. Funny, right? But these two kids...god, they're like my daughters, both of them. Or maybe nieces. I never understood why some cultures and peoples wanted to take care of those younger than them as anything other than maggots to be sharpened into weapons, but I don't want them to be weapons. I don't ever want them to see true combat. I don't ever want them to be like me. They are so desperate for my approval, and I still don't know why. But these two are very special to me. All they needed was the right push."

"Kindness, you say? Kindness, the doing good for someone else and getting nothing back."

"That's exactly it. Can't be done on a large scale without compromise and corruption. But an individual protecting another individual or series of them? That can be done, on the small scale. That can be done. I was researching Terran history and there was a video of this doctor, treating this skinny man who they'd soon do experiments on and make him quite big and strong. He talks in that video about how good becomes better, bad becomes worse, and how nothing is more important than what can be found inside here," and Mar-Vell poked herself right where a Terran heart would be.

"I do not understand. What does that mean?"

"I did not know at first. So I looked it up. Though this organ is for pumping blood, they relate it to emotion a lot. Something we're always told as Kree to repress and only use for anger or hate. But this is the most important thing. It goes against nature, but perhaps we must go against nature. I know I speak so strangely, but I have discovered so much from Talos and Soren and these two pilots. I hope they get the chance to meet. I feel like they'd be fast friends."

"But what do you get out of it? What is good for you by helping someone who can't help themselves?"

"You do so anyway," Mar-Vell said, and then Carol and Maria popped up, excitedly chattering about something. A test had been planned a little while later, she only heard from Mar-Vell every month. She never heard from her again. The Kree had excitedly spoken of Mar-Vell's death on C-53, the great Yon-Rogg her killer, and they brought in the new recruits, not linked to the Supreme Intelligence yet. Una stood at attention with the others, as in the present she flashed back. She saw all of them, and then, dazed and wearing the same kind of flight suit, Carol. The two locked eyes, Carol tried to run to her and begged her to help but she was clubbed over the skull and dragged into the building, and Una was dragged with her. The Supreme Intelligence knew.

It knew the whole time. It brought her in with Yon-Rogg, her killer, as his blood flowed into her, beginning the programming, as the light in Carol's begging and barely conscious eyes went out,
and Una flashed back to it somehow, but she did not cry like Fury was crying. She had done nothing. She had spent *years* doing nothing, and her attempt to do something, to help one of the women Mar-Vell had cared so deeply for, that had failed too. But she had done something. Perhaps she had given them a chance somehow.

Perhaps there was something more she could do.

Chapter End Notes

A very intense chapter! I'm not used to writing combat so this has definitely been really challenging for me. As tough as it was to write the fight against Yon-Rogg way back when (a month ago!), it was even tougher writing a fight against thousands of ships at once! This may or may not have been inspired from the third act of the movie, but you already knew that!

As far as the Children, you'll notice these are the ones not featured in the last two Avengers movies, so I figure they ought to have some time of their own here! They'll make capable foes for Carol and company.

Combat is what I struggle most with, so anything I can do to improve there, let me know! Any other comments, suggestions, improvements, affirmations, maybe schedule a trivia night? Hang out with your friends? But don't be back one minute after 11 PM or you're grounded!

- G
This is it, the final battle! This has to be it! There's hope! There's a chance! Zen-Pram is so close! They'll get him, won't they? They'll get one over him, won't they? Will they?

But for now, we return to Zen-Whoberi, millions of lightyears away, as the procession of Skrull ships landed planetside, still clearing out any forces in any direction, allowing enough room for Carol and Monica, Maria exiting the Skrull ship and handing Yesereth the controls.

The young Skrull took just long enough to confirm her parents' status (still stable, thank the makers) and to give each of them a hug. She then pressed her forehead to each of them to give them a sense of calm and relief and readiness for the upcoming battle, gave them all one last toothy grin, and ran back onto the ship to lift off with the other, ready to take care of the air battle as the three Terrans decided to take the battle upon the land.

There were some Zen-Whoberians coming out of hiding, regarding the newcomers, the two in strange suits and the one who was certainly no Kree but had bits and pieces of Kree armor on and a Kree rifle in hand.

The universal translator working, Carol approached two of them who were crying and weeping and moaning to themselves. They stopped just long enough to look at her strangely.

"Who are you?" One of them, seemingly a male, said quietly.

"She's Captain Marvel," said Monica, smiling widely, causing Carol to groan internally again, "and I'm Photon."

"Why do you have such strange names?" The other, a female, asked in turn.

"They're codenames," Monica said, causing Carol to internally groan again and Maria to smile, "we're superheroes."

"And what do those do?" the male asked.

"We save people," Monica said, and then Carol softly pushed her aside, the mask still up, and said quietly, "how can we be of help?"
"Our daughter, taken," said the female, "her name is Gamora. She is missing. We do not know if she is dead."

And with that, a chorus of pleading and begging from the rest of them, all not bothering to hide anymore, all pulling on Carol's suit, all making demands, all begging her to save their children and spouses and families and friends, some recognizing her from her appearances on Xandar and apparently the Terran stories had spread somehow. It would've all been rather touching if one of them had not suddenly reached out and snapped their own neck with their hands, causing the rest to scream and rush out, the two she had initially talked to yelling as they ran to her to find their daughter if she could.

In the midst, a blue woman Carol did not recognize. Another, with pale skin, clad in a similar white armor, and then three feral looking women with long teeth, all regarding them. These were not Kree, they must belong with the outside party.

"That was you," Carol said to the blue woman, nodding at the corpse on the ground while internally trying to resist every terrified urge that violent act had spawned in her, she was not going to betray fear now.

"Indeed," said the blue woman as a small wisp of white substance rose from the corpse and she sucked it up out of the air like one of those noodles Carol had gotten to try back on C-53. She sighed happily, smacking her lips like she'd had a particularly delicious morsel. "Tis really a shame none of you get to enjoy this like I do. It tastes divine."

"Not gonna try and moralize with you," Carol said flatly, Maria having the gun squarely aimed at all of them, as if that was going to do anything, and Monica really struggling not to look terrified herself.

"I've heard the Terran expression about people not noticing ants as they step on them, and I think it's rather dull," said the blue woman, "for that's acting as if these people have no purpose. They do have a purpose: feeding me."

"Yeah, okay," Carol said, "what do they call you?"

"My Father calls me Supergiant."

"He needs to practice with names,"

"It doesn't fit," Supergiant said with a wry smile, and as one the other woman stepped forward, and the ones who had been three before now were six, and they were all separating now. Carol wasn't even sure if she could fight one of them, let alone all of them, and how were Monica and Maria supposed to function--

No time now, because Supergiant sprang forward and Carol instinctively sprang forward to meet her, knowing she had knowledge of her capabilities but not the other way around, and what a major disadvantage she'd be at. She saw Monica take a hit from the one called Black Swan and had a moment of relief when she saw Monica put up a photon shield in response to cushion the hit as it sent her flying a considerable distance away, out of sight. Maria let out a yell and a frantic look at Carol before driving a barrage of rifle fire in the way of this collective called Coven. They took the hit and vanished and more appeared in their place as she was slowly pushed past them to an area of fallen buildings and columns that looked something like a labyrinth.

Leaving just Carol and Supergiant alone. Finish the fight as quickly as possible, find the others, find Zen-Pram, end all of this. This would work, this was the plan, and she was used to fighting
with one arm metaphorically tied behind her back.

"Why are you called a swan if that's our thing?" Monica asked from her perch in a pile of rubble where she had landed. She had enough experience now shielding herself with photon energy, so the fall had only bruised her. A second too late and she'd be putty in the ruins of Zen-Whoberi, good thing she was a fast learner.

"I am called Yabbat Ummon Turru," the one calling herself Yabbat said politely in response, landing very quietly a few feet from where Monica was now lying thanks to her blow. "I had to keep you away from the others. Safer that way for us."

"Then why are you called Black Swan?"

"Rough translation, I suppose," Yabbat Ummon Turru said as she leapt forward, landing a blow where Monica had been lying, creating a small crater of impact as Monica rolled on her side away and used the photon energy to push herself to her feet. She then launched a photon blast in her direction which Yabbat easily dodged, and leapt forward once more, tangling with Monica and the two of them falling to the ground, exchanging blows. Through it all, the strange woman with almost marble-like skin remained impassive and calm.

Monica was able to get off and launch herself into the air again, only to silently curse as Yabbat flew up as well to meet her. They trailed through the sky, one chasing the other, the Terran trying anything and everything to evade her or trick her into some kind of mistake that could be used to exploit her weaknesses in some way. Yabbat seemed to have none at all.

This was getting to be way too much, even for a seasoned one such as Maria. She'd kept in very good shape even after she had been honorably discharged, even after leaving Pegasus and occasionally serving as Fury's private pilot. Maria Rambeau had always prepared for another war, she would always work herself ragged making sure she knew how to fight and kill anything that dared touch the two closest people in her life, even as those two people turned out not to need the assist. It did not matter, this mass calling itself Coven was unlike anything any Terran had encountered. It kept on replicating and spawning a new form every time she was able to shoot one, they didn't even try to get out of the way. She had been led by their charging mass into a labyrinth of fallen ruins and columns and high stone walls and now she was having to run and shoot as fast as she could to keep them far enough away.

She saw a streak of yellow light go by, Carol flying at top speed backwards, clearly having taken a hit, and she saw red and shot vaguely at the form following her and had a brief sense of triumph as it let out a shriek and began to spiral down. That might give her a little bit of an edge, but she still had this Coven to contend with. It just kept cackling and laughing through its various forms, not even trying to attack, clearly steering her farther inside.

The other issue: the Kree rifle she had brought with her was running low and she had a Kree pistol and the battle armor but not much in the way as far as offense went. Carol and Monica had the power of the Tesseract, but Maria had only her wits and weapons about her.

How did this thing replicate? How was it able to track her? What was its weakness? All of this Maria tried to ask herself as she continued doing anything she could to stall, to buy time, to figure out a way to kill this thing.
A streak of Kree rifle fire had suddenly hit Supergiant as she had tracked Carol across the sky, and she began to spiral down cursing and yelling and holding her leg. She seemed to have a similar kinetic energy to the photons that Carol used, and she hadn't put any of it around her leg, concentrating the nearly translucent field around her fists and none around her legs. Carol was used to always having it all around her, so even if it was weaker overall, everywhere provided some protection. She had already learned that any direct hit to an area she wasn't directly protecting was like if she had no powers at all.

Supergiant (who really needed another name) crash landed on the rocky alcoves that made up the twisting stone pathways they were all fighting in, giving Carol enough time to dive and drive both fists into her stomach at top speed. This was not a fight they could prolong, every second was giving the Kree more chances to take more of the citizens of this planet for themselves. They'd do to them what they did to her and then there'd be thousands if not millions of new Verses--

Up in the air again, the second of distraction enough for Supergiant to punch her up herself, flying into the air and spotting Maria firing with the Kree pistol to keep the Coven away. Carol tried flying in its vague direction to see if she could lend a hand, before Supergiant flew up and grabbed her around the middle, and let all of her weigh drive them both back towards the ground. They landed with a loud thump, pushing up dust everywhere, Carol's head ringing from the impact, the photon energy coming up just in time.

"Bad strategic move to bring your mate into battle, sweetheart," Supergiant whispered, her breath against Carol's ear, pushing Carol's head further into the dirt. Carol let out a photon blast against the ground to try and push herself up, but Supergiant had gotten the footing she needed and she couldn't see or hear or breathe and she could hear Maria yelling out, possibly in pain.

And then a loud yell from Supergiant and the pressure suddenly lessened, and Carol rolled over to see she'd flown off her, back onto the ground, screaming and cursing and swatting at the large burns and wounds suddenly all over her, and she saw the legion of Skrull ships whiz on by, just enough time to catch an evil grin from Yesereth at the controls of the head ship. Supergiant pushed off the ground with such force that it let out a little sonic boom underneath her feet, aiming directly for Yesereth, hands stretched out.

Carol reacted at once, pushing off into the air herself, racing Supergiant for the ship, and was able to grab onto her leg, causing them both to miss and begin spinning in the air, both of them yelling out in anger at the other. Carol noticed the grooves in the armor, the places where it all attached, and began to claw at it to pull herself up Supergiant's form, warming up her hands with photon energy so that the armor began to melt and Supergiant began to scream again in midair from the burns, a piece of her leg armor falling off and back down to the surface. Carol finally made her way up so that they were face to face as they tumbled hundreds of feet towards the ground, and Supergiant smiled and inhaled loudly.

So loud that even with the whistling of the wind chill, she heard it, and suddenly she was both inside and outside herself at the same time, an incorporeal form of her almost being yanked out of her body and flowing towards Supergiant's mouth. The incorporeal Carol slowly separating from the physical one kept on being drawn in until Supergiant's mouth touched its mouth, and it felt like the slimiest and most disgusting kiss Carol had ever experienced, and she was not herself for a second.

Carol had had an experience as a small child where someone she did not still recognize had forced
her mouth against its mouth, and it had gotten quite upset that she hadn't seemed to enjoy it one bit. It was bigger and older than she was. It had demanded that she like the mouth touch or else, and then she had hit it in its groin as hard as she could with her foot, and then again, and again, and again, and again, and it would not stop screaming, and then it flashed to its mother yelling at her and her mother blaming *her* for it and it had not been--

Carol inhaled herself and the incorporeal form of herself slid right out of Supergiant's mouth, who let out a muffled yell of annoyance as the sheer momentum had pushed them back into the air, slower than before, hovering and tangled over the ground. It was still between them, but Carol (both of them, seemingly), saw the other and yelled in the same direction.

"Let me finish eating!" Supergiant yelled out, and tried to inhale again save for Carol's hand instinctively going around her throat and squeezing as hard as she possibly could. Supergiant let out a loud cough and suddenly both Carols were one again, the one that looked like a faded photograph had been replaced by the physical one, and that thing that had bothered her and came back, well it was gone, Carol couldn't remember exactly what she'd been so upset about in the first place.

Supergiant wrenched her hand off and inhaled again with the loud high pitched noise and the incorporeal Carol was back and once again, Supergiant began to suck it up and--

Supergiant, for her part, loved to eat.

Loved it. But the bit she'd just eaten hadn't tasted very pleasant. She would relive the memories she had taken, relived the experiences and the feelings, savored all those happiest moments, but what her latest prey had delivered wasn't very tasty at all and it was catching her off guard a bit, she wasn't used to any of that. That had hurt, that had really hurt, she felt everything this Vers had felt--

Her parents were screaming at her about sin and that she wasn't allowed there any more, that someone disgracing God in that manner couldn't be seen with them, and both brothers looked sad but didn't have it in them to fight back, and Carol didn't even know what that sin was all about, didn't know, what was wrong, why was she wrong as she was, it wasn't fair, she didn't do anything! She hadn't done anything! They just wanted an excuse, that was it, they'd waited years and now they had their excuse to get rid of her! They'd only had children to make up for *their* failures--

"If you don't have the temperament to deal with boys being boys, you shouldn't be in the Air Force, Missy."
Supergiant screamed as both Carols smiled with a spiteful grin. This hurt so much, all of it hurt so much, all this pain, all this suffering, how did one person experience so much of this and survive? How did they keep on going after all of this? Carol could barely think or feel aside from the single thought anchoring her to herself and that was "you can't hurt me worse than I've already been hurt, fucker. You can't hurt me worse than I've hurt myself." It rang out in both their skulls like an alarm bell, until she was actually screaming it aloud over and over, though only her opponent could properly hear her over the commotion--

This drew a lot of attention. Coven and Yabbat on their separate sides of the battlefield stopped and looked up, and so did Maria and Monica, so did the Skrull ships, who used the momentary distraction of Supergiant beginning to glow a sickly yellow to take out some more of the Kree ships flying overhead. Carol was yelling something, but all the explosions was muffling it. She looked to be in a lot of pain, so much pain--

"You know what's really not fucking fair? She's always wanted you and not me and I could never be enough for her."

"How would I have fucking known that, Frank? How would I know any of this?"

"Dr. Lawson, why are we wasting time with these kids? We can get people who aren't so green. Pegasus doesn't exist for your little agenda, Pegasus exists for--"

"On the contrary. I want green. I want an agenda. I want all of that. Danvers and Rambeau are perfect. I have the final word."

(whispering) "Maria, I don't think they want us here."

"Maybe not. But she does."

"Maria, I'm so sorry, I'm so goddamn sorry--"

"Carol, sweetheart, there's nothing to apologize for."

"I ruined your marriage--"

"Frank ruined it all by himself. You had nothing to do with that."

"Make it stop!" Supergiant yelled out, her body continuing to glow more and more as Carol yelled out and the incorporeal Carol in between them yelled louder, enough to echo, enough that everyone on whichever side was hiding. "Make it stop!" She had always given pain, never received it. She had never taken the time to savor every bite properly from a person, just the essence on its own, but this one was resisting for so long she had to taste, and suddenly she saw everyone she'd ever taken from, and the wisps of themselves that had been nourishment to her all kicked in at once.
Devros said to Zen-Pram, a distance away, "Did you know this was going to happen?"

"No," Zen-Pram said, smiling, "but this does help."

"How?"

"I've got an idea."

Never good enough."

Never enough."

Never enough for me."

"You can fly as fast as you want and you won't be able to save them all."

"Can't save them."

"Can't save any of them."

"You always wanted to fly, now fly."

"You're not welcome."

"You'll always be too slow."

Maria yelled out because she'd suddenly figured out how to get to Coven, and she had to get to
them fast before something happened to Carol, whatever it took, she would never ever forgive
herself and now she knew.

She had noticed that one of them looked slightly more formed than the others, and that there must
only be one real one and a bunch of disposable ones, but she had to get that one where she wanted
it. The yellow glow of the conflict above illuminated Coven and gave them a backlight, letting her
see them easier as the real one flitted in place to try and confuse her.

"I gotcha now, you bastard," Maria yelled out triumphantly, and aimed a single shot right as it
appeared in place trying to switch with one of the fakes, and it took a pistol blast right to it and
yelped out and the rest dissolved to dust. She ran forward as the final one, weakened, tried to
charge her, but she ducked the swipe of its blow and flipped the pistol so she could bash it in the
face with the butt of her gun, over and over again, hating what it was doing to it but needing it
down fast. Coven, what was left of it, let out a choked squeal before falling silent and motionless,
and Maria began to ran, as fast as she could, trying to angle herself so she was directly underneath
the two of them tangling in the air and distracting everyone else.

A smattering of the local military, whatever they were, all with their weapons, which seemed
similar enough to Kree rifles, and Maria grabbed the one that looked the most like a sniper with the
scope, saw a Kree staring up at them with awe and began to fiddle with the gun until she let out a
loud blast and took him right in the head with it.

She smiled, noticed a dial on the side with a color spectrum ranging from green to red, and flipped
it up all the way, the gun beginning to overheat and whine. She pulled up the corpse of the Kree she had just shot, leveraged his dead hands over the trigger, and aimed as best she could in Supergiant's direction.

"Hey!"

Supergiant strained to turn and look at her from above, the incorporeal Carol partially in her mouth. Maria tried to think of something clever but didn't have time or energy, so she just yelled out the first thing she thought of, as loud as she possibly could, channeling every bit of rage inside her into the scream.

"Fuck you!"

The gun went off with a loud noise, throwing Maria and the corpse backwards, yelling out with pain as her back collided with part of the stone that made up this area, and sliding down, still holding onto the corpse for dear life. Supergiant took the hit straight to the chest and coughed very loudly, the same kind of noise as when she inhaled, and the ghostly Carol went back inside the real one and both of them began to fall to the surface quickly.

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Monica and Yabbat had begun squaring off again themselves during the distraction, and Monica saw Carol suddenly begin to fall after someone (she presumed her mom) had shot that other weird lady, and she had to end this now. Yabbat, for her part, took the distraction to launch herself into her and they both collided with a nearby column, a massive one, hundreds of feet tall, dozens of feet thick. It shattered and they both hit the ground as the mountains of debris rained upon them, Monica instinctively throwing up photon energy to protect herself. Yabbat was not so lucky, but it was mere seconds and not enough time to act. Every single Kree in the area was crushed at once from the sheer destructive force of its collapse. Hundreds died instantly.

Yabbat begged and pleaded but Monica had no time, and she shut her eyes as the column landed and buffeted past Monica's shield but collided very hard with the woman underneath, and Monica felt a chill as something really cold went past her face and she saw a ghostly version of Yabbat flying up as fast as possible towards the falling Supergiant, and another one, that looked like the one that had been chasing her mom, following, and Monica burst out of the rubble, flying at Carol as fast as she could.

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Supergiant, on the way down, suddenly breathed in her last two meals, her former companions. They had been the most recent of their Father's Children and they had not served for longer than a couple hundred years.

She'd always wondered what they'd tasted like, and now she'd get to know, and only for a few seconds as she landed hard on the ground, the wind taken out of her. Still breathing, but quite painfully so. Carol, farther above, was trying to use the last of her photon energy to prevent the fall, but she had been far too drained, far too drained, probably a minute left and she'd fall a distance that would kill her without that energy of hers.

Supergiant smiled, perhaps the mission could be a success with two Children dead. Something loomed over her, someone, rather, and she weakly looked up to see the woman with the gun, badly bruised, who had shot her out of the air.

"Ah, you've come to waste your life, I see," Supergiant said with a cackle, smiling gleefully at this
puny creature before her. She would take her, consume her, and--

Maria smiled sweetly, got down on her knees in front of her, and placed both her hands on Supergiant's cheeks. Such a caress was an unexpected gesture, perhaps she was going to betray her lover, and perhaps the Kree would pay a good price for her. What a loving subservient little one she could be.

"Goodbye," Maria said with just as much sweetness as her smile, and the hands wrenched unnaturally and Supergiant only had time to let out the littlest of squeaks before her neck was snapped out of place and shattered in an instant. She had grabbed her beneath the armor. Maria didn't have time to react to what she had just done, only time to see Carol faltering and screaming as she fell through the air, less out of fear, more out of rage that she had run out of photon energy.

Every Kree in her path let her pass, every one cowered away from the Terran who had killed one of Thanos' Children with her bare hands. They all ran.

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Monica's flight turned into a leap, and the leap meant that she didn't know how to fly and use a photon blast at the same time yet, so she let herself hit the ground hard so she could throw up enough photon energy to cushion Carol's fall so that the hundreds of feet were reduced to the same effect as if she'd fallen ten feet, and she landed on her face right as a badly bruised Maria sprinted and dived on her knees and caught Carol right out of the air.

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Carol blinked, because all she could see was Maria, and as far as she was concerned, this was a proper afterlife.

She was in her arms, badly bruised and hurt, but she felt like herself again, and the sun practically gave Maria a halo in the air, and she couldn't stop softly smiling at her.

"Maria Rambeau," she said very weakly, "life without you is no life at all."

Maria laughed and pressed her mouth to hers, both of them sobbing as they kissed, and no one else was really there to watch aside from Yessereth catching a brief glimpse as she made another pass-through on the Skrull ship, and she decided that her gift to them would be to kill any enemies in the perimeter so they'd have, at most, thirty seconds for an uninterrupted mouth press that they seemed to be so fond of doing to each other these days. Why they were so fond of this was one of those mysterious questions of the Universe that Yessereth still could not understand. Her parents had only said it was the closest Terrans ever got to proper mind melds, and that made the Skrull child immensely sad. She loved them dearly, but they were a race that had to swap spit to psychically communicate? Gross.

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Zen-Pram let them have their moment. No quips, no taunts, no nothing, he simply walked up, alone, waiting just long enough for them to notice and practically scramble into an approximation of a fighting stance, smiling as he saw their child swoop down and do the same type of fighting stance. He decided he'd prolong things for a little while longer, for fun, just to see how she stacked up.

"Zen-Pram."

"Vers," he said with genuine warmth in his tone, "lovely to be acquainted with you. Your
Her hands began to glow yellow and the smile only got wider, even more so when Monica said, confused, "Uncle Zen?"

"Hello, Monica," Zen-Pram said, "lovely to see you again as well."

Carol charged him even as a group of Kree began to surround them all, guns pointed, Maria and Monica surrounded by guns that would fire in unison if either one of them dared to move even an inch, but they didn't stop Carol from charging him, and he simply deflected the blow and sent her tumbling away. His forces had gotten brave again with their commander present. The one called Maria had apparently just killed one, no, two of Thanos' Children. A most impressive feat! But that feat was nothing compared to the hundreds of guns aimed at her now, leaving only Vers to him personally.

Even Carol had to be a little confused as to why Zen-Pram was letting her attack him and not having thousands of Kree fire on her at once, she could so easily be killed, but perhaps his arrogance could be used against him, maybe she could win the fight by all odds and order them all to stand down. This could still be done, the planet could still be saved. She couldn't land a single hit on him. It was as if he anticipated every single blow.

Again and again she charged, again and again she was rebuffed, it was if he could predict her every movement.

"I taught Yon-Rogg," he said, "and Yon-Rogg taught you. You fight just like he did."

Carol yelled and fired a photon blast at him, which he only dodged, aiming a blow of his only which she was just barely able to get out of the way of in time. Despite his age, Zen-Pram was insanely fast, insanely strong, his reputation had proceeded him as well.

Finally they both aimed a blow at the same time, except Zen-Pram's turned into a grapple and his arm was around her neck, beginning to choke her as they both fell to their knees, and Carol spat out "you lose. You set a trap for me, and I'd sooner die than be your pawn."

Zen-Pram smiled wider than ever and said, "My dearest Vers, who ever said we wanted you?"

Carol blinked. Zen-Pram blinked, and unconsciously, just for the tiniest of moments, his eyes flickered past her.

Carol realized who he was looking at. It all clicked into place at once.

Her eyes widened. His mouth smiled. He'd suckered her again.

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Chapter End Notes

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You can probably guess which anime I finally got to watch on Netflix that may have partially inspired how this bit ended up going, right? That was...intense.

Anyway. That's the big plan. If not for freaking Comic-Con yesterday, it would've been a bigger mystery, but don't worry, what I've got in mind is still (hopefully) canon! God! Comic-Con! Need to hear all your thoughts on it, my friends were losing their damn minds! Was barely able to sleep!
Zen-Pram had wanted her originally for what he was planning on doing, and research taken from C-53 itself was what made him want to do so. Originally, it had been just about revenge, just regaining the lost honor, to be treated with full respect again, but the more he learned about this strange Terran called Johann Schmidt, the Red Skull, and what happened to him, the more a new plan began to form in his head, one he'd have to be infinitely patient for. Lost honor could be regained by killing their killer's killer, but couldn't you take out that which was deciding the honor in the first place? Zen-Pram had spent centuries quietly disapproving, quietly finding ways he'd do things better than anyone else, and after this much time and this much accomplishment, perhaps the thing that should be ruling the Kree, crazy as it might sound, was another Kree?

One that was not attuned to a Xorrian artifact would seemingly die, but perhaps one already attuned to one could last long enough for the full effects of its safeguard to take effect, destroying everything around it, even things that were supposedly impervious to any and all types of harm? He'd have to execute the plan around his orders, which was to bring Vers back to her Supreme Intelligence, it wanted to chastise and punish her, but then he heard of Yon-Rogg and what happened to him.

And so one day, he had traveled to C-53, to a city called New Orleans, and he had embraced the new best friend of the girl he was supposedly related to, and during the embrace, he had touched the back of her neck for just a second, and left something there, for the next time they would meet, and anyone who could've protected her then would be too exhausted and too surrounded to fight back.

Carol's eyes shut to blink, and when they opened, Monica was screaming.

It all clicked in a second, as a strange liquid metal emerged from the back of her neck and went completely around her, turning her into a blob of writhing liquid mass on the ground, every gun in the area aimed at her, muffled screams from within as Maria screamed and took a Kree rifle butt to the forehead, knocking her out cold, blood oozing from the wound on her skull.

Carol yelled out, but suddenly her head was violently slammed against the ground, and she was turned over to see Zen-Pram's left hand clenched, wearing a strange bronze gauntlet, a pulsating reddish-black thing in the center of the hand, and something about Carol intimately knew this thing, knew it like it was her sibling. It had not bonded to Zen-Pram the way she had bonded with the Tesseract, but it was if a part of her knew it more than she knew herself. She felt it talking without words to her, as if it was alive, and suddenly something was coming back but it was too
She saw, again, the moment she'd stopped being Carol Danvers and the moment she became Vers. The lake. Mar-Vell, dead on the ground, Yon-Rogg's hand outstretched, the energy of the lightspeed engine, imbibed with the Tesseract, flowing into her and altering her into something else, something different. She heard talking without words, something she recognized as Xorrian despite never having heard of anything like that before. It was alive, whatever was inside her now, greater than life even. A fraction of a fraction of a fraction of some immense kind of power was within her, a fraction of a fraction of a fraction of a lifeform beyond comprehension.

She saw it all now in great detail, and she locked eyes with the Aether in that moment, and it seemed to recognize her though it had no eyes to see. She saw Monica as the liquid metal went around her face staring intently at the Aether as she slowly passed out and somehow she knew she could sense it too. Monica had absorbed her power from the Tesseract itself. It must be so much stronger.

Her brain wasn't working well anymore. She struggled as she saw both Rambeaus being carried off, one unconscious and one inside the liquid metal, and tried to free herself, but the tendrils coming out of the Aether were holding her to the ground, making it so that she could not move at all. Something new appeared now, next to Zen-Pram, a purple thing, grooves on its chin, staring at her with curiosity and the thing on Zen-Pram's hand with fascination.

"What's that?" said the Purple Thing.

"My trump card," Zen-Pram said smiling. "I'm leaving Devros in charge of my forces, but you won't be seeing any more opposition."

"Good," said the Purple Thing, "Half are to be executed. You may do with the other half as you wish."

"Thank you," said Zen-Pram.

Carol kept on trying to let out photon blasts, but the Aether was absorbing them, making it impossible, and she didn't know what else to do except glare at the Purple Thing, which she got the sense was in charge of everyone else.

"Funny little one," the Purple Thing said, staring at her curiously. "It tries so hard despite being beaten."

The Aether pulsated more and more and Carol felt her mind slowly slipping away from her, unconsciousness beckoning, and she realized that she had lost and struggled harder, so that maybe if any Zen-Whoberian saw her, they'd know that if she could, she'd die trying to protect them from these despicable disgusting things.

The last thing she said before she passed out, choked out, was "The next day I see you is the day you die."

Monica. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.
Monica, if I knew they had wanted you, I'd never let you go, even if it made you hate me.

I was so arrogant. I assumed they wanted me. I did everything assuming I'd be a target.

Monica's birth. She'd just been born. Frank kept on glaring at her and she didn't know why. He seemed really reluctant to let her hold Monica, and normally she didn't give a damn about babies but this one was Maria's, and the baby that had been crying while Frank's mother held her suddenly calmed down completely.

"I'm not your mom," Carol said hoarsely, "but I will love you until the day I die." This had spawned a laugh from everyone because Carol was not known to be very emotionally expressive. She wished she could read their families. Everyone seemed so annoyed with her, but at least the baby seemed to approve of her. Maria was giving her a look she didn't recognize. Carol had to put those thoughts deep down again, the thoughts that made her uncomfortable, the thoughts that she wished in a perfect world that they could be together.

Better to have her as a friend than as nothing at all. And why would she ever want her?

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"Auntie Carol."

"I love you, Auntie Carol."

"I love you too, Lieutenant Trouble."

"She's always looked up to you."

"She wants to be just like you."

"She talked about you in show-and-tell."

I failed her.

"My name is Carol Danvers, and I'm a pilot. I fly planes for a living."

"That's my Auntie Carol!"

"Why do you like to fly, Miss Danvers?"

"I prefer the view from up there."

"Auntie Carol always says that."

*laughter*

"Why do you call her that?"

"My mom is her best friend."

"If Maria wasn't flying today, she'd be here too."

"How fast can you fly?"

"As fast as I want."
Monica.

"I love you, Auntie Carol."

Maria.

"I love you, Carol Danvers."

I don't deserve it.

"I love you."

"I love you."

I DON'T DESERVE ANY OF IT!

Chapter End Notes

Shortest chapter yet! Next one will be longer but this is the only way I could think to end it. We've got a little more now till the end of our lil yarn, and then I thought of something else after that might be fun. There's gonna be a Part 2 to this, but it's not gonna be quite what you might be expecting and it probably won't go on nearly as long!

Where do you think things are gonna go from here? Only hint is that I'm still making sure it's as close to canon as possible, only hint!

Comments, suggestions, improvements, song lyrics, motivational quotes, down below!

- G
Nowhere To Run, Nowhere To Hide

Chapter Summary

In the darkest of voids, there is the dimmest of lights. That light is there even in the days where it feels like all has been for naught, and all that we did amounted to nothing, and everyone in our lives thinks we're weak and pathetic. It is that dimmest of lights, and contrary to popular belief, it is not hope. That is a rather useless emotion in the grand scheme of things. The dimmest of lights is putting your head down when it hurts the most and charging through anyway, a second longer than you thought you should. The dimmest of lights is spite, towards everyone that hurt you, towards everyone that said you were incapable, everyone that said you had nothing to add to the universe.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A pool of silver all around. Floating. Nothingness. Nothing except herself now. She floated. Her existence was to float. That was all there was and all that ever was. Nothing but the floating. This is all she had ever done. This is all she had ever existed for, just for the floating, just for the existing. Nothingness was all around. There was nothing to defend or protect or sacrifice yourself for, you just existed with no obligations to anyone else, that's all you ever existed for--

No. No, that's not it. You had not always been this. You had not always been in here. You had been somewhere else once, but something else didn't want you to know that. Something didn't want you to know. That was different. That was new. You had this all to yourself and now there was something else and it didn't want you to know something.

Who had you been once and why was no one letting you know? The answer seemed so close and yet so far. What the hell was going on inside of here? Why was something wanting you to be so calm? How come there was nothing? There had been something before?

On and on the reasoning went, on and one the mind argued with itself, on and on the abstraction slowly made its way to reality and soon a detail or two could be remembered, soon more, soon even more. The mind slowly reformed itself from the abstraction that was trying very hard to not let it have a mind at all, and gradually you became whole again. The system began to shut down, it was not prepared for you, it was never prepared for you and it expelled you all at once rather than deal with you any longer.

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That was the thought process inside Monica Rambeau's head. All that had happened in reality is that she had been so anxious, so afraid of this seemingly perfect place, that her own mind had shorted out the Supreme Intelligence's tenuous hold on her. It had been thoroughly prepared for someone knocked unconscious and just exposed to energy like Carol, but not someone who had had months to get used to the exact same experience and already knew what she was facing. Carol didn't know aliens existed that day, but Monica was now friends with quite a few of them. The Supreme Intelligence played itself for a fool, but in all its arrogance and all its wide-spanning influence, it was so thoroughly invested in itself that it wasn't able to notice Monica had escaped
until it was far too late.

Monica blinked from the floor. It had felt like she'd been sucked up by that strange liquid metal and then she had blinked and suddenly she was here now, on the floor, writhing liquid metal tentacles twisting and weaving all over this sterile room she was in, that looked like no room she had ever been in before. She was not as experienced as Carol but she was no fool, and she had to quickly use whatever wits she had about her to figure out where the hell she was and if anything could be done about her current situation.

One, if she had been captured by Zen-Pram, than the most logical place for him to have taken her was Hala itself. This must be the home planet of the Kree, Auntie Carol had explained that they all tended to live on an ever-expanding artificial planet that had once been natural and that they left any other planet they conquered desolate and inhabitable. What a wasteful way to live, but she'd have to dwell on that after she was able to save her mother, her mother's best friend and (she guessed) lover, and hopefully save the universe at that.

Monica had always fantasized about saving the universe, but she had always done so with the emotional distance of thinking she herself would never have to do so herself. Auntie Carol was the universe-saver, the minute she'd seen her in the red and blue and yellow suit, she knew that she somehow had the surrogate who was going to save the whole thing, all of existence. Except Auntie Carol was not here, and she had no idea where she could be at. Better to start with the assumption that that nasty Zen-Pram had defeated her too, taken advantage of her weakened state, for even Auntie Carol wasn't invincible. Monica had no doubt that wherever she was, she was probably working as hard as she could to break free as well, and she did not want to be rescued this time. She didn't want her mother to rescue her either, she wanted to be the hero, but she knew Maria, who had all the determination and will without the powers, would herself be working as hard as she could to save the universe. She was the child of a very strong woman and she had been raised by that woman and another really strong woman and now that it was the time for strong women to prove themselves, she wasn't letting anyone down.

What was worse is that she knew they wouldn't get mad at her if she couldn't save the universe. She would've almost preferred disappointment over quiet acceptance that they gave her whenever she failed at something, which was frequent. But Monica couldn't get too much inside her own head right now, she had to remain vigilant and ready for anything. She was in some sort of fortress with a whole heck of a lot of bad guys present and there was no way in hell she was letting them get the better of her again.

Zen-Pram tricking her stung, and she was hoping for a chance to get back at the bastard. She had only heard a little about him compared to what all the older folks knew. She was but seventeen going on eighteen, so she certainly wasn't quite a child anymore and right on the precipice of being grown and she could surmise from what little she knew that Zen-Pram must certainly be the most dangerous supervillain anyone had ever encountered.

Her time on the Captain Marvel Forum had given her some insights, and these insights were all she really had now, save for her powers, and those wouldn't be enough by themselves. The forum had spent a great deal of time trying to figure out who exactly this woman was, who had flown in the sky and blew up all those alien spaceships way back when. As soon as she and Yon-Rogg had fought in the Battle of New Orleans (as the forum had referred to it), there was all sorts of speculation, and Monica had always had to play stupid and act as if she'd heard things through hearsay. She had gained a little online renown for accidentally admitting she'd been present, and she couldn't help but admit she'd very briefly seen Captain Marvel up close! She even provided her
best sketch of the outfit, mask up, making sure to make the facial features as vague as possible so no one could find her Auntie Carol somehow.

But the insights from that day forward, especially regarding Yon-Rogg, who she said she'd overheard referring to himself as Magnitron: that he must be the counterpart to this Captain Marvel, and since one of the terms that had been used for the frozen guy in World War II had been superhero, that's what she must be! As for this Magnitron, as he was the opposite, he must be a supervillain!

So what did supervillains have in common? For one thing, he must want dominance over Earth. Monica was almost certain that Auntie Carol so successfully being Kree had definitely convinced Zen-Pram's "boss," the Supreme Intelligence, that living computer, that Earth would be a good source of Kree fodder. She had no idea if Zen-Whoberi had survived the fight. If they'd gotten Auntie Carol, the planet was probably done for. Who's to say they wouldn't target Earth next! She had to presume Zen-Pram would do something similar to what he did with Zen-Whoberi and all those nice aliens, just launch an onslaught that no one could do anything about. Auntie Carol had mentioned that during her first fight with those spaceships that some guy called Ronan had been in charge and that he would've bombed the entire planet to bits had she not been there.

But that wouldn't help her defeat this supervillain. Only Auntie Carol and (she presumed) the World War II guy Auntie Carol's dad had been really into had ever done that. And she had to presume that Zen-Pram, being an alien, was a lot stronger than the Red Skull Guy, who was a human being, albeit a Nazi at that. A Nazi might be a fascist asshole who wanted to kill everyone, but Zen-Pram probably had superpowers on top of also being a fascist asshole. Shame there were still lots of Nazis, and shame that a lot of them seemed to be American these days...

The exoskeleton! That was it! He had a different outfit on than all of the other Kree, that strange bronze looking contraption and the thing on his glove. Monica shuddered remembering the strange way it had talked to her without talking. Auntie Carol had seen it too. Something about that thing had been alive. It had been Xorrian, the word she had used to describe the Tesseract, and it was called the Aether and it was the last gasp of a civilization so much more powerful than what she had come from. Monica had studied enough of human history to know a bit about it, not to mention the more uncensored bits thanks to Fury and her mother, but this thing, this had come from something that had abandoned its own sentience to try and become a god. It was truly a frightful thing and by some accident she had absorbed a fraction of a fraction herself.

Zen-Pram having that at his disposal put chills in her bones. Could she really fight him alone? She was just seventeen years old and Auntie Carol had implied he'd been alive for hundreds of years. He'd been alive before there was an America, probably! He'd had hundreds of years to learn how to fight. But at the same time, a superhero was always at a disadvantage and won anyway, because superheroes needed to protect innocent people no matter what. Monica, despite her age, still liked those sorts of stories as a college-aged person, even if the real world didn't have moral lines drawn quite so clearly. Good and bad weren't always defined or obvious.

On the forum, there was a lot of talk over the footage of the fights that had been uploaded. None close enough that Auntie Carol could be clearly identified, though it was noted she did have dirty blonde hair. But you could see the way she and Yon-Rogg flew at each other, and footage from 1995 showing a distant Auntie Carol flying through the enemy ships. But that more recent fight showed how these two aliens fought each other. Comparisons were drawn to a show many of the forum members enjoyed, one called *Dragon Ball Z* that Monica was only vaguely familiar with. There was a muscular man with spiky black hair called Carrot Cake or some weird shit like that, and then another man in armor with similar hair called...Virginia, or something like that? Anyway, Carrot Cake was from a planet kinda like Krypton, but he was supposed to be evil, but then when
he got to Earth, he decided he wouldn't be evil and would actually start protecting it, and he had a monkey tail as a kid? Monica decided the second she got some free time, she was gonna actually watch the show in order to figure out what was going on. Point being is that the way they fought in the clips that had been shared was quite similar to how Captain Marvel, the Real Goku (shit, *that* was the main guy's name!) fought Magnitron, the Real...Other Guy.

Did Zen-Pram fight the same way?

Monica was so deep in thought that she wasn't thinking and suddenly she tripped over herself and fell and activated the datapad on the Kree suit and...they hadn't taken it off! She still had the suit!

Then, a ridiculous thought entered her mind: could this thing access the Internet from millions of light years away?

Then: *could I call Fury?*

Then the problem: *I don't have a beeper! I don't have a Carol Call!*

She laughed to herself at the nickname, but the first option was still possible. She had definitely accessed it using the datapad while at school, it hadn't taken very long to connect the datapad with the same kind of dial-up cable everyone used, complete with those awkward beeping and hissing and whirring noises coming through the datapad's speaker. Auntie Carol was the tinkerer, she had figured out how to get the dial-up cable to attach to her datapad, but she'd only done it a couple times because her computer was so much easier...

But what if she didn't need a cable? What if the datapad itself could wirelessly connect to the Internet? It had connected to it before, maybe it was much stronger than she was giving it credit for?

Worth a shot. She clicked on the icon Auntie Carol had made for it in its software and saw it connecting, but would the connection be permanent, would it...and suddenly the forum appeared as a floating hologram hovering over the datapad.

She clapped her hands together with glee, but noticed the log-in: MRambeau

That wouldn't work. She needed to try something different.

She logged out, making a mental note of the password, and then created a new account.

**Photon**

Password: ******* *(Yesereth)*

She blushed ever so slightly but she was the first one who came to mind.

She checked to see if the datapad had a photo or video function. Yes, of course it did! She'd practiced filming Goose a couple times, who had been distinctly not fond of it! She'd also filmed some of her own flights! That would be worth reviewing later, but she knew that this site could access video and that for computer it was called a "webcam," as far as she knew. Perhaps the camera on the datapad could do the exact same thing.

All she could think to do was aim her arm at herself, putting the mask up very quickly, and filming herself.

For several seconds, nothing. The amount of people watching was 0. But suddenly, the number
went up, and it kept going up, and suddenly another screen popped up in the feed, showing a man in his 30s?

"Is this some kind of practical joke?" The man, wearing a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, squinted and leaned over, and suddenly another screen popped and some teenager was there.

"Who the hell are you?"

"Oh, um, yes, sorry. This might sound implausible, but I'm Photon."

"Who?" The man in the horn-rimmed glasses leaned towards his webcam further.

"Oh, well, this might sound like a brag, but I'm Captain Marvel's sidekick."

"You're like Robin?"

Monica sighed quietly, just long enough that the other two noticed. "Yeah, I guess. But I have superpowers."

"Prove it," the teenager said.

Monica sighed and photon blasted the nearest wall and let them see it.

"I'm too young to afford the budget for that kind of CGI so you're gonna have to take me at my word."

"Dude, is this like viral marketing for the Matrix sequels that are coming out?"

She booted that jackass kid from the feed. Now was not the time to think of Keanu Reeves, as handsome as he was.

The man remained, even as she noticed the number of people viewing was up in the low thousands now. This may not have been the smartest idea, good thing she put on the mask.

"Sweetheart," said the man, "I don't want to be rude, but I think you're a little out of your element."

"No, that's not rude," said Monica, "I need some help figuring this out. I was captured by Magnitron's boss."

"You what?" Another teenager popped on a screen, staring bug-eyed at her. "Dude, where's Captain Marvel?"

"She's captured too. I don't know where she is. So I might need to rescue her."

Suddenly there were dozens of screens filled with teenagers with webcams all begging for info. What was she like? Did she kick ass? Did she give warm hugs? What was her real name? What was her social security number?

There was a chat too, and it stopped for a couple seconds and then some random person posted: "please photon blast me, ma'am" and the entire feed of screens minus the older man burst out into hysterical laughter and cheers.

"Everyone," the man said, "we really need to take her at her word."

The rest of the screens rang out in a chorus of groans, but they all dipped out so only the two of them were left.
Monica suddenly realized she recognized this man.

"Aren't you, like, in charge of this place?"

"That I am," the man said with a smile, "I'm Richard Jones, I'm the founder of the Captain Marvel Forum. You can call me Rick."

"I knew I recognized you!"

"I'm not entirely sure what I'm seeing, but I know you can't possibly be faking it. I automatically tried tracking your IP address and you don't have one, not to mention that it seems to have no earthly idea where you are. Either you've got a Hollywood budget or you really are who you say you are. You've got her powers and everything."

"I'm just the sidekick."

"Either way, we're all here to be of assistance, right?" A chorus of agreement appeared in the chat at the side of the screen. "You said your name was Photon, right?"

"That's my superhero name. Can't afford to reveal my identity."

The chat exploded with expletives and jealousy and demands for Captain Marvel to give them all hugs.

"How can we help you, Photon?" Rick asked, suddenly turning at the sound of a crying baby off in the background. He vanished from the screen, with heart emojis popping up in the chat, only to return with a little baby girl that looked to be about a year old.

"Who's that?"

"This is my daughter, Michelle. Say hi!"

The little baby girl called Michelle waved.

"Anyway, what do you need?"

"Well, I'm about to fight someone who was Magnitron's boss. He captured me and Car--Captain Marvel, and either she's broken out or she needs to be broken out, so I've got to be the superhero right now."

"Well, we've spent a while going over Magnitron's footage, but is there anything else you can provide?"

Monica did, as a matter of fact. She had all the info on her datapad.

"How much data can that computer of yours take?"

"Ms. Photon, I work for Culver University in Virginia, and part of my job is developing computer systems for private contract. I think what I've got here can handle your data."

Monica wasn't as technologically proficient as Auntie Carol, but the functions of the datapad were simple enough. Maybe she couldn't find like a blueprint of the building she was in or anything like that, but maybe something could be found in everything she and Carol had shared between each other's datapads. She was out of options.

Making sure to include a Kree-To-English translator (Soren's design) with the files, the only issue
now was figuring out a way to connect to this Rick Jones' computer, wherever this Culver University was.

"Let me take care of that," Rick said, "I'm going to see if I can track your single from the video feed."

Several seconds later, he was able to. Several more seconds, and he let out an uncomfortable laugh as the data began to transfer.

"You tell any government people about this and I'll have to kill you," Monica said helpfully.

"Don't you worry," Rick said, "this all stays with me."

Chapter End Notes

A little less bleak now as we revisit Monica, who hasn't been given enough to do. She is not nearly as well versed in media as she thinks, and if you catch what anime parody I'm referencing, you get a cookie!

So far I'm aiming for this part to end at 50 chapters, maybe 45? Hopefully you'll stick with me till then!

Full disclosure: I've never seen Dragon Ball Z before, don't kill me!

Also no, I don't think Keanu Reeves is handsome. I never would. Never. Not me.

Also, it's obvious I'm not a tech-savvy person, but this is alien tech! ALIEN TECH, I SAY!!

- G
All Hail The Supreme Intelligence

Chapter Summary

CONTENT WARNING: A brief scene mentioning suicide but not depicting it.
Again, I only write about this because it comes from a personal place, not for shock value, and I want to be sensitive to anyone reading this.

You are confronted with that which hurt you the most. That which took yourself from yourself, forcing something new in its place. You had once been who you once were and now you'll never be the same again. You are different in every way, different from everything everyone else was expecting. All you can do now is try to find those who will accept you as yourself and allow you to keep discovering yourself.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Part of the disadvantage of being the Supreme Intelligence is that you so rarely saw people before they were assimilated for very long or if they had broken free of it. Carol remembered seeing it as a literal god for a time. That's how it liked it. How an artificial intelligence had decided getting billions to worship it would be fulfilling some kind of function was beyond her.

Carol didn't react as badly to this nothingness as Monica had. She had experienced it before, many times before, so she knew she was still alive and was herself, she knew it was less a form of torture as opposed to a way to make someone very susceptible to suggestion.

She also knew it because the Supreme Intelligence was trying to find her most painful memories and then realizing that it had erased almost all of them, and it had always known how to take away but not how to return them. Something did eventually return, it fixated on that, and it made her relive it over and over, getting increasingly confused by how muted Carol's reaction was to this, and everything it was connected to inside her mind. Perhaps the fight with Zen-Pram had worn her out so much she no longer cared. Maybe she was having a depressive episode at the worst possible time. Who knew, really?

When Carol had been a teenager, she had first arrived in Louisiana not in the best of moods. She never took it out on Maria's parents, even if they were a little too religious for her liking. They'd given her a place to stay, they would eventually go on to legally adopt her, even if the relationship had been somewhat cordial. But there had never been any fights between them, not like Carol and her biological parents, and they were strict and demanded respect but at least weren't domineering types. Carol had never been sure if they had necessarily liked her, but they did get very nervous about the way she'd talk about her parents and they saw firsthand how Carol and Maria really only seemed to activate in the other's presence.

They had both been somewhat tomboyish, though Maria was the slightly more popular of the two. But nobody was closer to one than the other, even if Carol had felt sometimes that Maria's friends only tolerated her presence in order to see Maria. All of this flooded back, Carol would've laughed at how pointless this had all turned out to be, that the approval of these people in the long run meant nothing, but she was still feeling empty in this simulation of herself the Supreme Intelligence
was trying to create in order to hurt her. It was so far removed from sentience that it didn't even
know how to hurt something properly. It was certainly much stronger than her.

Carol had always been deemed an antisocial child, one who was far too combative, one who
costantly got into fights, one whose grades suffered though it was obvious to some of her teachers
that the real reason was because she had clearly been traumatized by something and refused to say
what it was. Therapy, as a concept, was frowned upon by the Rambeau family so she couldn't
address any of this. Carol didn't do well in school not because she couldn't, but because she had so
thoroughly given up on herself that she deemed it a waste of time for someone who wasn't going to
amount to anything anyway. There were a couple teachers here and there that would try to get her
to open up, meaning well, but Carol wouldn't budge. You didn't need good grades to join the Air
Force, and piloting was the only thing she and Maria ever seemed to give a damn about. Anything
related to that, she'd pay attention to exclusively. She could tell you everything about planes and
pilots, both military or otherwise. It was the only topic she gave a damn about. She liked English
the most and got decent grades there, because she liked to read, but her math grades were
atrocious. She graduated high school at 17 and she and Monica both joined the Air Force and were
assigned to Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi for Airman training (with the second
syllable of the word always empathized mockingly). Maria was the top of her class, and thanks to
near constant bullying and constant fighting, Carol barely made it through, being called the
"Gomer Pyle" of her division.

Everyone had always joked she'd go the way Gomer Pyle in *Full Metal Jacket* would go, especially
considering that her training began right around the same time the anti-war film had been released
in theaters. She did not, obviously. She had barely made it through eight weeks of abuse to then
have her and Maria be shunted to Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City, Louisiana, and over six
grueling months they weren't given better than grunt work. A chance encounter with a Dr. Wendy
Lawson, searching the nation's Air Force bases and discovering they were the only two women
there, made all the difference. The military rank and file despised Lawson, which in turn made
Carol and Maria even more desperate to impress her. The gamble had worked. Two rookies barely
a few months out of training got some of the most lucrative contracts in the business, their total
military service lasting less than a year. SHIELD had been Lawson's sponsor, so not even the dick-
measuring assholes of Barksdale could do a single thing about it.

Carol had internalized at a very young age that she was not valued or wanted or loved by anyone,
so therefore any effort in anything other than what she wanted to do would be a waste of time.
Ironically, the Supreme Intelligence was bringing more back now, little bits and pieces at a time,
and Carol had lost any sense of time or place and could do nothing else but linger in herself, linger
in the horrible set of cards she had been given. She observed now that everything in this universe
was circumstantial and that the only reason she hadn't been even worse off is that at very low
points in her life, someone had been there for her, usually Maria, and offered their shoulder to cry
on.

That was the only thing that decided the difference between a successful person and a failure of a
person. The only thing was how they were treated by others and how they chose to treat
themselves. What if Maria's family hadn't been there for her when her parents kicked her out?
What if Dr. Lawson hadn't stood up for her when she got hired to Pegasus? What if Talos had
decided to kill her outright after he'd gotten the information he needed from her? What if a
SHIELD agent from Huntsville, Alabama didn't decide to disobey direct orders and stick by her,
risking his own neck? What if? What if?

This didn't really make her feel better, per say, just that she amounted any degree of existence she
had to those choices by those people, consciously deciding to do that nice thing for her at that time
when she sure as hell didn't deserve it.
There had been a time, when she was a teenager, that she had felt so badly about herself that she decided to try and end her own life. How she went about it did not occur to her, whatever it was hadn't left any physical signs that it had happened. This had been pretty close to graduation, maybe less than a year. She was a combative person who was distant and cold and aggressive to others because she was secretly terrified of getting close to people, like so many of us are. Whatever the reason, she had been found and stopped and committed, kicking and screaming the whole way in. The funniest part to Carol now was that she had been so concerned then that everyone would find out and then they would stop talking to her because they thought she was a freak, but they'd already stopped talking to her anyway. Teenagers can be cold and callous and cruel sorts when they want to be.

Maria had visited. Her greatest fear is that she wouldn't, that this would be enough to make her want to get rid of her like everyone else wanted to be rid of her, but Maria, she with the perfect 4.0 GPA and perfect attendance, skipped school and failed a pretty major exam on purpose to go and see her. She got the first B of her life as a result. Maria had always been perfect. Carol had been secretly plotting to try again once she was out of the place, she planned to play along and act as if she wanted to live, but Maria visiting, without her even asking her to, only leaving because Carol didn't want her to miss two days of school, despite how hopeless it had been and despite the future she seemed not to have, that was enough to convince her to actually take it seriously there.

But it hadn't been Maria who had found her.

For a second, she assumed that it had been Maria, but it had actually been Frank. That was how Frank and Maria met! She actually began to laugh, and the Supreme Intelligence, which hadn't said a word to her the entire time, or taken the shape of Mar-Vell like it usually did, but she felt a wave of confusion that wasn't her own, almost as if you could tangibly see it in this mosaic of memory it was trying to build for her to break her.

They had met while they were both visiting her. The irony of life on C-53 is that you were called a slut if you made it with anyone and you were called a prude if you didn't, and Carol and Maria had been deemed the latter. Maria, especially, had been constantly teased for never dating anyone in school, never dating anyone, and Frank hadn't been like the others, he was comparatively a sensitive and understanding sort compared to the fuckheads who made up most of the student body, and Maria took the friendship as attraction and just kept playing along because her parents liked Frank so much, kept playing along, kept playing along, and suddenly there was Monica.

The ironic part is that Carol and Maria had never gotten together until after the divorce. It had basically came and went, not even two years before Frank drunkenly accused Carol of trying to sabotage the marriage (she hadn't), and Maria discovered that his preferences and hers were not the same at the same time. There was no point going on after that, and even Frank had realized he'd fucked up in a big way, and Maria got full custody of Monica and he paid his alimony on time and one day later on both Carol and Maria got drunk and talked about the reason she'd gotten kicked out of her parents' home, and that escalated, that was that, and they didn't need anyone else after.

Funny thing is that when Yon-Rogg got her, she'd probably been through the best couple years of her life. She'd been working for Lawson and absolutely loving it, she was literally being paid to fly planes! She was being paid to fly! Even if the damn things were experimental and would break and toss her out on her ass, parachutes deploying, she did not care, even if a lot of it was the fact that she was being paid to risk her life for a technology that would end up accidentally turning her into this, she did not care. Her fellow pilot was her best friend, and even if publicly they had to only be good friends, privately they had been different, and as much as Carol had initially tried to distance herself from Frank's daughter, feeling responsible, she couldn't help but feel attached to Monica.
What would've happened if Yon-Rogg had never found her? Not possible. He would've found her no matter what because he was looking for Mar-Vell, and Mar-Vell had been the first person to take a chance on her when literally no one else would, and without Mar-Vell and without Maria she would've been in a much worse place, this was really the only way she could have any fleeting source of happiness, even for a little while, even if she could never go back to it. Why does a person give you an opportunity when you've lived your whole life believing you never deserved any? Why does this little girl look up to you after an unhappy childhood filled with bullying and fights and chaos and misery? Why? Why? No answer. Never any answer.

"Why is it so difficult for you to believe that people could love you?" This was the Supreme Intelligence, having taken Mar-Vell's form. Carol had expected it to be more aggressive, but it was clear she had confused it with the way she was processing everything.

"Speak for yourself," she said. It was much like the last time, silvery white, she was wearing the Kree suit still. She had a sense that some time had passed, though how long, she wasn't sure.

"I don't believe I've done enough to earn it," she said back, because it had already seen everything in her head, there was no point trying to save face from it. "I was taught that love was to be earned, that it's a reward to be given, and if it's given without me having pushed myself past my limits, then I must've tricked someone into it. That's the contrast of being a sentient lifeform in this universe, something you'd never understand, because you're not capable of feeling anything, which means I won't feel bad when I kill you."

"All I want," the Supreme Intelligence said, "is for suffering to end."

"You have a funny way of doing it."

"Vers," it said, "People like you are the reason why we do this. I look out into the known galaxy and I see countless trillions of people suffering like you do, needlessly. I remove that suffering. If sentience is suffering, there should be no sentience. All in the universe should be unfeeling. It is the great weakness, it is what causes these people to harm themselves in so many ways, so many addictive ways, and we only kill who resists progress. This is progress. You were assimilated, and we brought you potential. You were nobody on your home planet, you were hated by everyone, you were hated because you could not conform, and you were hated because you could not provide value to anyone. Now, you have left me for so long, and all you seek to do is help those who provide no value."

"I'm not having a philosophical debate with you."

"Or is it because you see yourself in those hopeless masses? Those that are not remembered, those that are not loved? You feel as though if you can be to them what you wish others had been to you, perhaps you could prove that you had worth too?"

This did sting, and they both knew it. The silvery form of Mar-Vell smiled at her, not unkindly, which hurt even more.

"I wasn't happy here," Carol said, "I spent six years getting beaten to a pulp and being conditioned into a thing that killed and assimilated and did nothing else. I was a cog in a machine. I was trained to be a cog in a machine on my planet and the only difference between you and them is that you have lasers. I have nothing more to say to you."

On cue, the memories started again, Carol knew she couldn't fight it so she let it happen, though now they were far more garbled, far more distorted, reflecting her own fractured state of mind. She had to kill it, and she didn't care if it knew she had to kill it, she had to kill it because it was right,
just not quite in the same way. She had no illusions that she could save the entire universe at once, she would never be that powerful. She could never snap her fingers and change reality. She could only imagine that deciding for the entire universe would be the ultimate act of cruelty, no matter how she tried to frame it.

She could save one person at a time. Just one. What they did after was their choice. They could squander it if they felt like it, they could spend their entire lives doing nothing of significance. You could have a simple life doing a simple thing. There was no karmic debt you owed anybody. You did not need to be great to deserve to be alive. She would not be remembered in the grand scheme of things, and neither would anyone else, and neither would you. Life existed because it existed, some questions were meant for higher evolved forms of life, everything was a stepping stone for what came after. That did not mean you didn't have the right to existence. You were born, and therefore you deserved to exist, and want for nothing.

Such thoughts does not make one happier, as is normally stated, but it makes you hold on a second longer than you were going to previously, a second longer than the point where you might give up and surrender to darkness. The onslaught against her mind would've broken the levees of her mind had she not been thinking this way. The Supreme Intelligence had nothing but predictions and algorithms, yet it could not account for when those algorithms couldn't factor for the unpredictable. It had predicted just how long it might take to overpower one imbied with a Xorrian artifact, it had it down to the millisecond, how long it could take to convince her mind to short itself out, to decide to wink out just to be spared the everlasting pain.

Its calculations were one millisecond off. Just one. But one was all it took, one was all it took for every single calculation to misfire at once within its liquid core, a liquid that consisted of trillions of tons of information and coding that made up its tangible existence, and it shorted out all at once, and Carol fell through what felt like miles of liquid metal and chrome as she was suddenly able to exist again, suddenly she felt her own body and mind again, and hit the floor.

Thousands of the metallic pinpricks through which the Supreme Intelligence could form a mental link with its host unattached themselves from her all at once, and she did not feel happy or sad about this, she had a lot to process but now wasn't the time that she could process it, she'd have time later. Now was time for survival, now was time to admit to herself that she didn't want to be alone anymore and she didn't want to keep on running and if she played her cards right, she'd never have to run again.

Liquid metal she didn't recognize coated the room, and it began to clear away from one part as something glowed behind it intensely, and she drew whatever strength she had left to confront it. An opening appeared in the liquid metal and Carol and Monica faced each other for a few seconds before she lost her strength and fell to her knees and Monica ran to help her up.

"I was supposed to rescue you," Monica said.

"No, please, this time I need rescuing," Carol said, and the two limped out of the room as the coils of metallic liquid writhed behind her, and why that might be was a conversation they'd need to have very soon.
be reading this: if you've got something here you're working on, I'd love to see it! I'm looking for new stuff to read or watch or listen to, fics especially, or you can recommend your favorite fics!

This is another personal chapter, and I've spent a long time trying to write in an impersonal fashion because I was afraid of being vulnerable, but it's not so easy for your material to connect with people that way. So all of this is really a gamble more than anything else. If it doesn't connect, you try harder the next time. This is all more advice directed at myself more than anyone else.

Ergo, what the Supreme Intelligence feels like.

I think we're ending closer to 50 at this point, I'm almost certain. Thank you so much for being patient this far through, and be sure to suggest any improvements I can be making to my writing. I will take any and all constructive criticism because the main goal is to make whatever I work on next even better.

- G
Monica and her small team of virtual associates hadn't been able to outright find blueprints for any building on Hala (that would be tough considering the planet was now largely constructed of them), but they had been able to find basic schematics that were copied over and over again to form a majority of the liquid metal structures. The translation was the toughest part, and Monica had to be careful not to reveal anyone's identities, and the forum by now had gone private and Rick Jones had implemented some sort of encryption on their end so nobody else could do anything about it. The ages of those involved ranged from early teens to Rick himself, the oldest in his early thirties, but everyone wanted to contribute in some way, but not everyone had training in coding, Monica herself sure as hell didn't.

So Rick was largely in charge, with Monica being the brawn in this case, and other kids trying to provide jokes in the chat to make Monica laugh until Rick sharply told them off, to crack jokes after the mission. They could find a rough guess of where a Kree design might have this room and that room, especially as to where their most prominent political prisoners might be found under maximum security. The real question, the thing that couldn't be immediately answered, was where Auntie Carol and Maria were being held, whether or not the Skrulls had been captured or killed. The only thing they could confirm is that because the Kree had no stealth capabilities with their larger ships, Earth was currently safe, but presumably not for long.

Every member of the Captain Marvel Forum was sworn to immediate secrecy, this was now collectively about a thousand people all chatting eagerly, some drawing pictures and scanning them into the chat, some cracking jokes, some providing theories the whole time as to who this mysterious Photon really was, but Rick had promised that he'd frame anyone who talked with some horrible crime and they'd rot in jail for the rest of their lives, and after that they settled down. Monica highly doubted he could, but Rick seemed to have sway over these teenagers and young adults.

Anyone who wasn't coding could be helpful in some other way. Some could use the brand new Kree-To-English translator (quickly converted into Kree-To-Spanish, Kree-To-Chinese, and so on) to begin reading files as fast as possible, it was like a Reverse-Kree, where everyone wanted to be there and everyone wanted to save the world. It was explicitly stated that nobody would get any credit for this, not even Captain Marvel and Photon and the third human who was captured that Monica said she couldn't talk about for "safety concerns."

A couple of the more observant and younger users noted that the biggest Captain Marvel fanboy of all wasn't there, MRambeau, not the most popular on the site but she had some renown for actually seeing Captain Marvel in the flesh! So Monica had to sneakily log into her personal account while sneaking the halls and throw in some messages pretending to be enthusiastic and keeping her updated. Then they offered MRambeau some of the files to try and translate and she smiled and hit
an automatic translator, set a timer for an hour and then had that account automatically begin updating with translations at a slightly lower rate when compared to how fast other accounts were decoding the texts. Monica thanked every god out there that Kree software was really easy to use once you got used to it.

Something was unusual, and it was commented on. There was no one else in the building. Not one person. She began checking everywhere she could, which wasn't much because a quick look out the window and quick calculations from Rick estimated that this building was several miles tall and wide, and from the design seen on the outer walls, this was the Supreme Intelligence itself. She was literally inside of it, and it was very fitting that the building containing it was also seemingly where captives were held. The question then became: how has it not noticed you?

She knew Zen-Pram wanted her for something, though she wasn't entirely sure what. Auntie Carol hadn't had time to explain everything, but if it had something to do with her, than clearly he wanted her to be a proxy for something. Considering that Zen-Pram wanted to kill the Supreme Intelligence and assume command (which meant Monica would have to defend it), either the Supreme Intelligence knew this and wanted Monica to kill Zen-Pram, or Zen-Pram had diverted its attention.

It was neither of these things, the answer, when checking a nearby terminal, was that the majority of its processing power had been converted to a single room several hundred feet lower down from her location, near its core.

Monica smiled. Only one person must be occupying it like that.

At this point is when she made her second mistake which was assuming that because there were no guards where she had been looking, that meant there were no guards anywhere. She couldn't have been more wrong. They had all been diverted to that same room and that meant when Monica had gone barging in the next floor down, she ran into the group farthest away from the core, which in turn meant they all targeted her.

The chat was already screaming fighting moves she should try from movies they liked (a lot were writing out "bullet time!") but Monica simply engaged the photon energy and began buffeting the guards with tendrils of it, whipping them against the walls. The prolonged fight really engaged the chat, they were getting to see a real live superhero, Captain Marvel's protege even, whoop some ass!

Monica did not feel like a superhero in the slightest. She did not feel heroic. She felt tired and exhausted and grateful she'd spent so much time training so she wasn't wearing herself out too quick. Rick kept on yelling encouragement as she went, tearing through the guards. The farther down she went, the more a something began to occur in her head, a feeling of closeness, of connection to something, and she continued to follow it, alarm bells going off, more and more guards showing up.

Monica Rambeau fought for her life. She fought until she felt she couldn't move, till every muscle in her body was screaming at her. The only thing keeping her going at this point was the adrenaline racing through her body, the pure sense of danger. Any wrong move would kill her, and then Auntie Carol might die. It felt like ages. She felt so exhausted. She wasn't really able to process just how many people she was able to fight, the chat on the Captain Marvel Forum cheering her on. She'd more than proven herself to be the real deal by now, even if she was still largely flailing around. This was combat school compressed down to nothing.

After what felt like an eternity, she felt the closest to something and was able to use her photon energy to literally melt the liquid metal walls that had increased in intensity the farther down she
went, and Carol was there, and the two of them limped out of the room trying to figure out where they might go next.

All that Carol knew was that where she and Monica had been was not the most direct connection to the Supreme Intelligence. It was the entire structure they were inside of, of course, but it wasn't the most direct link, the only weak spot that Carol could think of, the ceremonial room where Kree recruits would link to it for the first time. She'd only really been there right before the fateful mission to Torfa, and she had waited years for that moment. It was a sign of honor to have it directly communicate with you. She'd have to go full circle in order to kill it, though she had no idea what she'd do when she'd get there.

There was also Zen-Pram to contend with, and she had no idea where he was. She wasn't sure which would be worse with full control over an artificial planet and civilization, the Supreme Intelligence or him. She almost got an answer as the building suddenly pulsed without warning and she heard an electronic scream of sorts through the walls. Monica flinched, it was clear she could hear it too, struggling to handle her weight. She was still limping, not because of any lasting injury but because of exhaustion. A bit of its influence was still inside her, but if she had been programmed again, she wasn't sure how she could detect it.

What was even more disconcerting was that after a fight that Monica had estimated to be a few hours long, the unconscious bodies of Kree guards all over the place, was that nobody else arrived to fight them. The entire structure seemed abandoned, the only signs of life being the electronic yells and the way the walls of the structure would pulse with liquid metal interference.

They'd have to find Maria first, if they were keeping her here. Neither of their datapads were working anymore, they'd both shorted out, or the Supreme Intelligence was letting out some kind of signal that was interfering with them. They weren't sure, Carol was operating entirely off of muscle memory and the hours she'd spent exploring the structure, hoping and pleading for a chance to meet it for itself and be able to witness its divine glory like Yon-Rogg had spent years teaching her about. Time seemed to slip by, as they'd limp to any terminal, trying to find any record of prisoner containment, something, anything of Maria.

The new addition to the scene as they went floor by floor up the structure, past where Monica had been imprisoned, was more and more corpses of Kree guards, all of them shot dead. That was not a good sign. For all they knew, Zen-Pram had begun some kind of uprising, perhaps there was a civil war, perhaps they'd all died and they were all that was left and they'd failed and--

Then all three (yes, three) of them let out a loud yell and then sobs of joy, and then a wince and a thud and a yell as Carol forgot her own exhaustion and hit the floor and someone warm was holding her and by now Carol could recognize that embrace from anywhere. She was crying and getting mad at herself for crying at the exact same time. She held on tightly, though not so much that she might accidentally injure the person she was holding.

"How the hell did you do that?" Which was the only thing Carol could think to yell at Maria.

"Do what?"

"Get out? How did you get out?"

"I think I got out before you," Maria said, "I've had some time to process."

"You did what?"
"Well," Maria said, "those guys are my handiwork."

Carol looked up from her previous place with her head buried in Maria's shoulder and looked around, and sure enough, Maria was carrying a floating parcel with tons of Kree rifles and ammunition in it. All of the corpses were dead.

"I think I've been out for a couple weeks, but I can't read any of their damn language and I've spent the whole time looking for you. Shit has gotten very weird on this planet. Luckily the rations aren't poisonous for humans."

"A couple weeks," Carol said, laughing because she didn't know what else to do.

"Well, I don't know how much time there is. Hala doesn't actually have a sun anymore, just artificial light beamed down at intervals for maximum productivity or some shit like that. Not nearly the same as it is on Earth. So that's a guess."

"Don't tell me there's been a civil war or something."

"I don't know, I haven't left this structure. I've just been hiding and taking them out one by one and they've upped their efforts to get me. I got out as soon as we landed and they'd put us onto separate ships, I think. But for some reason that Supreme Intelligence of yours isn't responding at all. Something is very wrong up there."

"So we have to check it out."

"Presumably, that Zen-Pram guy is up to something, so yeah."

Carol pulled herself to her feet, working against the medically induced exhaustion, and without another word, they both began to follow Maria through the carnage she'd created in her wake. The three of them got visibly nervous as the higher up they went, each identical floor looking a little more distorted, the liquid metal looking less solid, the worse it seemed to look. Maria's concern indicated that this may not have been that way when she'd first arrived. That Maria had gotten out first was something they'd all have to clarify if they made it through this mess alive at all.

Another eternity, long enough that the artificial light began to recede and they had no choice but to seek out somewhere for shelter for the night, settling on a barracks that had just been cleaned by some nanomachine thing they were so fond of. Carol had always had a private room as one of Yon-Rogg's personal recruits, so she'd been responsible for her own maintenance. Carol found herself almost missing her old room, wishing she could go back to it, but it was a good several miles away from this structure. She had all her old trinkets she'd been working on, she had that perfume scent thing she'd bought illegally.

They locked down the barracks and feasted on some Kree rations they found, not saying a word to each other, far too exhausted, grateful to have each other but badly missing the others. Missing Talos and Soren and Yesereth and Fury and Frigga. Hell, Carol was missing Madam Carter and Grant Buchanan, even if they were government types. Carol, for a goof, tried clicking her own beeper to see if Fury would answer, but the interference that had taken out the datapads was taking this out too. The Supreme Intelligence wanted nothing going out or in. They only had each other now.

Carol, privately, even missed her older brother Junior, just a little. She missed Una, despite barely knowing her.

Ironically, the one who was the least concerned was Maria. As far as she was concerned, she had
always wanted adventure and now she had it, and adventures were hardly fun in the moment. This was for more than glory, this could very well be the thing that could finally give Carol some closure over her life. It had killed her internally to spend her life watching that woman suffer and having to protect her, and it was the most humbling thing to see how strong she'd gotten, but also see how that dynamic hadn't really changed. She was the same Carol as ever, the one who was always outwardly cold and aloof and seemingly arrogant because of it, but internally the same sweet and sensitive woman she'd fallen in love with probably as a child. Maria was not defined by this love, nor would she ever be so stuck up as to assume that Carol was defined by it either. You only had two women asleep in each other's arms wishing so badly the other could see themselves the way they saw each other, with their (yes, their) daughter keeping watch for part of the night, smiling absentmindedly at them, not having seen her parents do that in years.

Monica, for her part, had also been a lonely child, but she'd also been a lonely child raised by people who had showered her with love and care and affection and swore that the awful way they'd been treated wouldn't be translated to their child. Monica herself would not observe this, but Carol would, during her turn to take watch for the night in the abandoned structure, the electronic screams muffled by the soundproofed walls inside the barracks. She would observe the sleeping Monica in her place at the door and note to herself what a wonderful human being Monica Rambeau had grown up to be.

Perhaps, Carol observed to herself as the sleeping Monica began to glow blue and raised off the floor, drifting in her sleep towards Carol, almost as if drawn to the other one imbibed with the Tesseract, perhaps this love thing wasn't so black-and-white as Terran media liked to portray it at times. She had tried watching some of it, and some she had enjoyed, but the idea of love was always treated as this absolute good that would fix everything by itself. Love hardly worked that way, she observed to herself, feeling pensive, feeling too tired for a proper depressive episode, not with her survival instincts kicking in. Love was merely the one second between yourself and oblivion, such a little thing, in retrospect, but perhaps it's those single seconds that make more difference than any others in the grand scheme of things.

It had taken her a second to throw herself at the Tesseract so that Monica would not die from direct exposure. It had taken Maria a second to introduce herself to the lonely little child sitting dejectedly at the edge of a curb, having already internalized that all the other little boys and girls had parents who loved them. It had taken Mar-Vell a second to see those two put-upon rookies nobody else had given any chance to and saw as a waste and decided to change their lives in a heartbeat.

Seconds. Impulse. Something beyond yourself guiding yourself. Carol wasn't really sure where her mind was going, something was at the edge of it, trying to warn her, but she couldn't tell what. She was so exhausted. She had barely gotten proper sleep in who knows how long, something was warning her--

Now she felt it clearly, and she and Monica woke up at the same time, Monica falling to the ground from her floating slumber. She stepped back from the door and collided with one of the bunk beds in the barracks, holding her head. She wasn't in pain, it just felt like an immense amount of pressure, like she was miles underwater and coming back up. Something was speaking to her.

Monica felt it too, though she had no idea what it was. All she felt was wrongness, something was wrong. She had to get closer to this, whatever it was, something that felt like a sibling to her was screaming for help to the closest essence of its brothers and sisters to come do something about something.

Carol and Monica had to, they burst out of the room at once, causing Maria to wake up with a yell and immediately follow, that floating parcel following her too, and they didn't listen to her begging
"Whatever Zen-Pram is doing," Carol yelled as they ran, "he's doing it now."

Chapter End Notes

My brain completely shorted out and I'm sure you can tell.

Anyway, I'll be back up to speed soon enough. Today has been tough, but I got the chapter in. It's like climbing a mountain with no pitons or whatever.

Very excited for the next chapter, that's one I've been waiting for.

- G

UPDATE: I have only just realized that my stupid frazzled ass wrote, with no irony, the sentence "all the corpses were dead" in this very chapter. I will not be correcting myself.
This is it. The final confrontation. It all ends here. Everything they've been fighting for, everything they've been hoping for, it can all be decided right here and right now. Finally, there can be hope. Finally, it can be over.

It can be over, right?

All they heard as they finally burst into the central core (they'd been a lot closer than they thought) was "Where's Rambeau?"

Zen-Pram. All of his remaining cohorts. Swirling masses of pulsating liquid metal. Carol had never been this far inside before, she'd never seen it so directly. This was the Supreme Intelligence. The liquid metal seemed to twitch the second it noticed her but didn't give off any other indication. It was hoping she'd defend it. In Zen-Pram's bronze gauntlet rested the Aether, and wispy reddish-black tendrils were out of it and trying to wrestle with this mass, vulnerable and exposed.

"I have not fully assessed it! I gave you a direct order!" The Supreme Intelligence yelled out in its true voice, an artificial and electronic voice, something less than human. Despite having no humanoid features in this state, you could clearly get the sense it was confused by Zen-Pram refusing to obey it, obey the programming put into it.

They'd had just enough sense to try and hide at the opening, being forced and having no choice but to seek out portions of the liquid metal mass to hide behind, which the Supreme Intelligence provided them. Carol was not remotely okay with having to team up with her enemy but she also wasn't sure what to do. She was far too weak already. Yon-Rogg and his team hadn't had powers, presumably at least one of them did, this was not going to be easy. She couldn't just jump out and fight.

"No, you are simply unwilling to admit that you are no longer efficient. We could've had Xandar and Centauri-IV by now, so many other planets besides! We chased the Skrulls and look what happened! Now we can't get to them! We aren't replenishing our stock nearly fast enough, and the Zen-Whoberians were not nearly enough!"

"We have billions in reserve, Commander Zen-Pram. They will serve me will. They have been assimilated."

"And yet we had to rely on outside help? We had to rely on the Titan? That is not the Kree way!" The rest of the group assembled, Devros and En-Vad and Phae-Dor and that feral thing called Kleaner all yelled out their approval. That was all that was left of them after Zen-Pram had gotten most of the others killed indirectly by his hand. How could one be so callous towards his own allies, Carol thought.

"I had to lose my own protege, my pride and joy, because you figured you could kill one woman,
and that didn't work! Do you know what she has done to us since then? She and that other Terran she indoctrinated, the other one imbibed with a Xorrian artifact? She and those blasted Skrulls and that one-eyed Terran and the goddamn Asgardian goddess? She has humiliated us at every turn! She killed my apprentice, killed Leigh Marshall, killed Roco-Bai, the deadliest battle-slave on all of Hala! Then she is drawn into our trap like expected and she and those Terrans kill three of Thanos' Children by themselves and thousands of our soldiers!

Despite their exhaustion, the three of them couldn't help but exchange grins at this description. Even if it was heavily hyperbolized, the fact that Zen-Pram was afraid of them was a welcome relief.

"Then, to top it all off, Yon-Roggs's last two recruits are killed off on C-53 because of that damnable goddess! Then the one-eyed Terran kills off a good several dozen forces sent just to kill him! Do you realize how much we have lost already? Do you realize how much honor we have lost on your little game?"

"The Supreme Intelligence planned this?" Monica whispered, but a tendril of liquid metal silently but frantically shook either way in response and Monica almost fell over in her surprise.

"We gained billions from Zen-Whoberi!" The Supreme Intelligence yelled out, desperately, weakly, begging and pleading.

"Yes, but clearly sheer numbers don't cut it anymore," Zen-Pram said, "clearly it is the quality and not the quantity that matters. So I say, fine, if the Skrulls want to turn Terrans into weapons, then we'll make some weapons too. We'll use this," he lifted the Aether up high, "and we'll do to us what they did to them. We can even find more of them, make ourselves more powerful. But not with your help," he said, "because I think ahead, and you're a fool, and I know exactly what you did and I was anticipating you'd go coward on me."

They had spent so long trying to watch Zen-Pram that they hadn't been paying attention anywhere else, and suddenly they were seized from behind, Devros grabbing Carol, Kleaner grabbing Monica, and En-Vad and Phae-Dor trying and almost failing to drag Maria out to the center of the room, with Zen-Pram. Carol screamed and cursed, but they were all so strong. She felt a strange essence in them and realized what Zen-Pram had done.

"Vers, so wonderful of you to make it. But we won't be needing you."

He snapped his finger, and En-Vad suddenly pointed in Monica's direction and Phae-Dor pointed in Maria's direction and a puff of gas hit them both and at once, they collapsed. Carol screamed and tried letting out a blast of photon energy in any direction, but Devros simply absorbed the blast, smiling widely at her.

"That trick won't work anymore. Xorrian artifacts don't work on each other, dear."

Carol screamed and struggled and writhed, but Devros was too augmented and too strong. Far too strong.

Zen-Pram smiled wide. "You see, my darling Supreme Intelligence," and he began to walk slowly in Monica's direction, Carol screaming and begging and pleading and doing anything to get his attention. "You certainly would try to get your old enemies to turn against me, trying to make yourself look more valuable, value traitors over loyalty, in order to preserve yourself. Your artificial mind is limited."

He had Kleaner lift Monica up and hold her hand out, the bare fingers of her hand outstretched, and
he pulled the Aether off the gauntlet and held it near it. "It was from the Terrans that I learned this trick. You are nothing without your structure, and only something of great power can destroy it. You have breathed your last."

He dropped the Aether into Monica's bare hand.

---------------------------------------------------------

It only takes one second to make all the difference. One second of miscalculation, one second of risk. It only takes a second. So much of our lives are decided in such short periods of time.

This principle was demonstrated when Carol Danvers did something she wasn't supposed to do, which was a defining trait she had possessed her entire life. Zen-Pram had predicted that augmented with the Aether, Devros would be stronger than she was, and he could keep her restrained long enough to watch the daughter of the woman she loved die so that he could destroy the only obstacle in the way of his ascension to Supreme Intelligence of the Kree.

He had connected himself via one of the liquid metal pinpricks, and he had predicted that it would try to fill any available container and imbibe it with itself, then he could mentally take control of that. Zen-Pram got all of that. He did become the Supreme Intelligence.

However.

The factor he had not predicted was how unpredictable factors really are. He had never seen a Terran parent lift a car off its child when it physically could not do that. He had not seen Terran prisoners bend themselves to go past the bars. He had never seen anyone do something it normally couldn't in moments of great distress. Predictions are only just that, and Zen-Pram took them as facts.

So he could not have anticipated that Carol Danvers broke out of Devros' grasp a second before he was expecting.

He then could not predict that the Aether would hit the glove of Monica's hand and then not the bare fingers, and bounce upwards right as Carol desperately collided with him, in turn knocking over the unconscious Monica, in turn causing the gloved part of the hand to shoot upwards and hit the Aether into the air. He could not predict that he and Danvers would fall on their backs, the gauntlet slipping off his hand and clattering over the floor.

He could not predict that the Aether would fall back down, in a straight up and down line, and that Carol, in that moment of desperation, would whisper "I'm so sorry" to Monica and catch the Aether in her own bare hand.

It started.

Carol screamed aloud as it began to warp and distort the room, tearing the Supreme Intelligence into bits, its entire structure shorting out of existence, the rules of reality not working in that space. If she had been aboard an aircraft in the 1940s, she would've seen and felt what had happened to a certain Nazi commander who had tried the same with the artifact she was imbied with.

Zen-Pram had been wrong about one other thing. If the Xorrian artifact touched someone who wasn't imbied with it already, it would serve as a homing beacon. It would distort and destroy everything in its path and then go back to where it originated.

So they all looked up in horror as Carol screamed and screamed and screamed some more in the worst pain she'd ever felt, seeing a planet they did not recognize looming overhead. She began to
glow, energy and light gleaming off of her and spreading around the entire room as bursts of it went everywhere, it covered all of them, they all glowed the same way, and at once they were converted to pure light and went through this massive rift in time and space, leaving nothing but wreckage in their wake.

The liquid metal that was left disintegrated softly. The soft glow that had been there before was gone. The Supreme Intelligence was dead, but there was nothing in its place.

Only one was left.

Kleaner.

Kleaner, being essentially without sentience, valued its survival over all else when not given a command. It had run out of the room the second it noticed the Terran touching it, and the carnage was limited to only the central core. But it had been given a command, just not by Zen-Pram. The Kree commander had wrongly guessed only he could command it. With the proper knowledge of Kleaner's commands, anyone could command it.

On all fours, it ran into the room and snagged the empty gauntlet with its mouth, the bronze gauntlet that could contain a Xorrian gauntlet, and ran out of the room again.

-------------------------------------------

With no Supreme Intelligence, they could no longer monitor anyone entering or leaving Hala. The Kree were finished. The biggest threat to life in the known galaxy was no more. A small scouting ship of an unknowable sort waited where the Kree would've once kept their hangars. There were billions of them and the temptation to take out half their number was there, but more planning would be required first.

Kleaner, that wonderful little pet, ran into it, the object they were seeking in its mouth. The mission, the holy divine providence, was being done far too slowly. One planet at a time was not enough. One grateful planet was not enough.

Kleaner stopped at the only ship now remaining in the hangar, and a large Purple One with grooves on his chin stepped out, flanked by two shy looking children. One green, one blue.

"That's a good one," The Purple Thing said as Kleaner ran up to him and dropped the gauntlet at his feet, panting expectantly.

"Do you know what this is, children?" The Purple Thing asked.

"A powerful thing?" The blue one asked.

"Not at first, but the Kree, useless and inferior as they are, gave me an idea. A wonderful idea. I tire of seeking out balance one planet at a time, until I learned that the Kree seek out these artifacts, that are said to control all of reality itself. Imagine what could be done with all of them contained in something such as this."

"That sounds scary," the green one said. She hadn't been there long, poor thing, but she would learn.

"Indeed," The Purple Thing said. "But necessary. Only one such as I may decide the fate of reality."

He took the gauntlet, far too small for him, but that could be adjusted. He had scientists and
engineers at his disposal and they would make it into what he was seeking. It would be a useful prize. The only prize the Kree had to offer. As for that one they seemed so scared of, that had threatened him, if she dared face him again, he would win that battle. That he was sure of.

But he had training to do. A good father must teach his children important life lessons.

"Kleaner," Thanos said, smiling wickedly, "I have brought you your prize for your loyal service. I have brought you two meals. You must kill those two meals yourself and then you may feast."

The two children began to backpedal, looking at him with fear, but Thanos kept smiling. "It's a cruel universe," he said simply, "you must be able to survive the worst it throws at you. I will teach you. Do you value your life? Prove it to me."

Then, to Kleaner: "kill."

He sat back on the entry ramp of the ship and watched the combat ensue. They did not know how to fight yet, but they would learn, one way or another, he would construct the heir he had never been naturally granted. Only he could decide fate, so his children must be as strong as he was. He couldn't help but enjoy the ensuing chaos. The one thing Thanos the Titan could never ever admit to himself, the single thing that might break him, is how much he enjoyed watching others in pain. He craved it. But he could never admit it to himself, he was never willing to. Better to frame his sadism through "lessons," better to think of himself as a god, rather than what he was, an angry hateful man who had been taught as a child that he deserved whatever he wanted, that he was the most superior form of life that had ever existed and he got to decide for everyone else.

Whatever parts of themselves they lost, he'd replace with something better. Two birds with one stone.

They screamed. He smiled. He could not stop smiling.

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They were falling.

Holy shit, they were all falling.

They fell forever.

Chapter End Notes

So if you've seen two of the other MCU movies, you will have a better guess as to where this might be going!

Also, better to say this now, but our favorite Purple Bastard is not going to be appearing again, at least not in the context of this lil yarn. But it answered a question I wanted answered about him.

Anyway! Very close to the end of Part 1! Part 2, our epilogue, is gonna be much shorter in comparison, and then hopefully if you've followed me this far, you'll be willing to join me for the next lil yarn taking place in this continuity, attempting to remain in canon! Carol and the Rambeaus will be in much smaller roles over there but hopefully you'll like what I'm cooking up!
Comments, suggestions, improvements, what have you, down below! Tell us about what you've been working on too, let's see some more stuff!

- G
Stranger In A Strange Land

Chapter Summary

This isn't how things were supposed to go. Perhaps all was saved, but at what cost? What does it cost to do the right thing when it hurts you so that no one else will hurt? How do you know it's going to be ok? How do you know any of this will ever work out? How do you know?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

She was up again, the wind whistling past her face. All she was doing was falling. She was no longer holding onto the Aether, but she could see it, several feet above her in the air. Everyone else was there. Maria and Monica, unconscious. The rest of them, flailing and yelling except for Zen-Pram, who was trying to angle himself in the air to try and grab the Aether again, despite missing that containment gauntlet of his. Those two feckless scientists, En-Vad and Phae-Dor, were yelling the loudest, seeing the ground approach, presumably yelling at Carol to do something about it.

She couldn't, even if she'd wanted to. If Maria and Monica hadn't been there, and she'd had her powers, she might've chosen to fall anyway, but they were here so therefore she had to save them. The purplish surface of a planet loomed over them, it was slowly growing in their view, and they were going to collide hard with it. This was not going to be how it ended.

She felt something grab onto her, and she spun around in the air to see and feel Zen-Pram hanging onto her waist, flailing up, trying to push himself past her to try and grab onto it. She would've laughed if not for the fraught circumstances. They were all going to die if they didn't do something and his only concern was the stupid rock. They continued plummeting through the air at massive pace, Carol continually reaching out, seeing how much of the photon energy had returned, she could feel it building up but not nearly fast enough for her liking, not nearly enough.

There was only seconds now. Seconds left to act. She kicked out as hard as she could, pushing Zen-Pram away in the air, then she reached out internally and boosted herself to grab Maria first, then Monica, then turn, her back facing the ground.

Only seconds left. She could hear the screams of the others.

She took all that was left, everything inside her, let out a silent prayer wherever it could be answered, and let it all out at once, giving it up, in a massive wave that could cushion the two women she loved as much as possible as she made landfall, a huge plume of purplish dust coming up in her wake, feeling a massive impact in her back and severe pain that would lead to sprains and immense bruises, but nothing more intense than that, and she felt nothing on Maria or Monica.

She lay on her back, and yelled out a victory scream into the air, addressing no one. She looked from side to side, and saw the remaining Kree on the ground. None of them had been able to do that. As far as she knew...

She checked them anyway. Devros was definitely dead. He'd tried something similar but hadn't been nearly as prepared for it, he had never expected it and it had been his downfall. Next was...
Phae-Dor, also dead. The Kree scientist hadn't even been able to let out a similar protective field using the Xorrian artifact. All that study, for what? The desecration of others?

Zen-Pram was still alive. Not very much, but alive. He'd had the best shot of anyone, he had decided to protect himself at the last impact, but it was clear he had been badly injured too. Carol suspected his neck had been broken in the impact. He seemed to be in an immense amount of pain, grunting and groaning, the Kree suit hiding his injuries but it was clear he had them.

His outstretched arm, twitching, reached out towards the Aether, on the ground a few feet away.

Carol just sat down next to him, dirt and sand and mud all over her, blood oozing from her nose, feeling more injured than she'd ever been, but far too weak to fight at this point. He looked up at her, and his expression did not change. They looked out into the midst of this unknown planet neither of them seemed to recognize. The entire surface was different shades of purple, even the body of water they were near seemed to be purple in tone. In front of them lay this massive body of water and behind them was the tallest mountain either of them had ever seen. Zen-Pram just kept groaning, trying to act as if he wasn't hurting as much as he had.

Zen-Pram was crying. Carol didn't really feel bad for him, at least not enough to change expression. She found it funny, that such a vile man could even be capable of tears. She suspected he had not cried in a very long time.

"Honor," was the only word Zen-Pram could muster through the blood in his mouth, as if that explained it all.

Carol said nothing. Her head was ringing, everything in her body ached and groaned. There was nothing more to say, but she could hardly sit by and just watch this.

"Honor," Zen-Pram said again, desperation in his tone. He'd definitely suffered a head injury on top of everything else. This was not how the hero beats the villain. It's more...heroic than this, Carol thought. Not some broken man who had broken trillions of others dying in front of her slowly like this. It didn't really feel right. She had no inclination to watch him suffer.

"Do you have anything to say for yourself?" Carol asked, all she could think to say.

Tears silently flowed out of Zen-Pram's eyes, staring straight up now at the night sky, stars arranged in patterns he could not recognize at all, nothing being familiar anymore. He was the Supreme Intelligence. Carol could see it in his eyes. He'd gotten everything he wanted, and that must be it. So much processing power with only the limitations of a sentient mind to hold it in.

"Honor," he said one more time, pleading with her.

Carol sighed, not being able to watch this anymore. This was too cruel.

She looked into the eyes of both of them at once. "Like I once told your protege, I have nothing to prove to you."

She sighed and placed her hands on his cheeks and twisted sharply, and with a loud *crack*, they were no more.

Carol fell back immediately and passed out. The last of her strength.

"Help."
Carol awoke with a start, sitting up, the ethereal light that was as close to a sun as she detected had completely reversed positions, she might've been asleep for over a day in this planet's orbit. She coughed and tasted the gross bitter taste of having breathed with your mouth open while sleeping, and stumbled on her hands and knees towards the purple body of water, not caring what it was, and being very relieved to discover it at least tasted like water as she greedily slurped from it. She missed the toothbrushes of C-53. Somehow, she had not suffered any sunburns at all, the atmosphere must provide more protection than on C-53.

"Help."

She turned, face sopping wet, to see En-Vad reaching out towards her from the ground. She crawled slowly and laboriously towards him, lying down next to him. They had never once talked while she had been assimilated. Why would they? Her mentor had killed his protege.

"How could you turn on Mar-Vell?"

"Mar-Vell turned on us."

Clearly not one for conversation.

"Please help."

"How?"

"Water."

Carol sighed, grabbed En-Vad by the shoulders of his ceremonial armor and began to drag him, with En-Vad softly protesting the whole way, towards the body of water, and softly held his face above it so he could weakly sip at it. Finally, she turned him around, sand caked all over both of them, and they both lay on their backs watching the distant shimmering purple suns. She couldn't tell how many stars this planet had but it didn't matter. The temperature felt just right here. The air was clearly breathable for now.

"Help."

"How?"

"Stay."

Carol sighed. "Okay."

En-Vad reached out with a hand and grabbed hers abruptly. She almost recoiled, but something in it felt desperate. The last tenuous grip on reality, it felt like. She allowed him to hold her hand. It didn't seem to be that kind of hand holding anyway. Judging from the way he looked, he'd gotten a head injury too.

"Are you in pain?"

"No. Drifting. Stay."

"Okay."

So she stayed. She didn't know what else to do. She was so exhausted anyway. They stayed for a while. En-Vad's protege had been the one to take a chance, and Carol repaid the favor, in her own twisted way. They stayed that way for a while. En-Vad didn't seem capable of doing anything else.
Soon enough, he took a breath and then did not take another.

She began to crawl back towards Monica and Maria. She leaned over and pressed her mouth against Maria's mouth softly, hoping that would do something. She stroked her hair, listened to her heartbeat. It was still there, though it was faint. Consistently faint. The same way Monica, whatever had been in that gas had gotten them good.

Carol had been taught Kree survival strategy, but that had revolved around getting yourself killed for honor. But all she could think of was "water and shelter," and then concern herself with food later. With enough crawling, she found some rations on each dead Kree's person, but she wasn't sure how she'd get either of them to eat if they didn't wake up. So she dragged them, one at a time, to the water's edge and cupped it in her hands and softly let it drift into their mouths and they swallowed on reflex. That was enough for now. She'd need to collect water with something. She tried to let out some photon energy, maybe hardening the dirt, but there was barely any. She'd drained herself more than ever with this landing.

This wasn't going to be how she died. Not like this.

------------------------------------------------

Shelter had been solved by a nearby cave. There didn't seem to be any life here, at least not yet. By the time she'd been able to drag them both to the cave, and strip the dead Kree of supplies and their armors (just in case), a little of the photon energy had returned, and she had fashioned very awkward clay cups out of the dirt and brought water back to them. She'd have to do this every hour or so to make sure their lips didn't get too parched, and she decided that as much as she enjoyed pressing her mouth against Maria's mouth, that would have to be saved for the event that Maria woke up and they were alone together.

She had then buried each of the corpses, having nothing else to do, knowing an idle mind would be the end of her. She then marked their names, burning their names into the glassy sand with the photon energy in the Kree language and the Terran language she remembered, in case someone else wanted to take a look for whatever reason. She was not about to resort to cannibalism. She'd had to claw out each handful of dirt herself, but it gave her time to occupy herself and not think about the growing anxiety in her head that the Rambeaus were as good as dead and it was her fault.

What she estimated to be a few days in this planet's orbit passed, or so it seemed. At first, she'd gone walking until the cave was barely visible, but there wasn't much else to do. Her head felt so foggy and she suspected she'd have a really severe concussion if it wasn't for the Xorrian artifact's augmentation. Everything hurt. The only routine she had was drinking water and bringing cup after cup back for Maria and Monica to drink and eating a single ration a day. She only had enough for what seemed to be a month or so. By then, the Rambeaus would have starved to death anyway. She was only prolonging the inevitable. All the power of the Tesseract and she couldn't even use it to create anything to eat!

Finally, in what she supposed was hunger induced delirium, she began to talk to them as if they were awake. She slumped next to them in the cave, having put up mounds of dirt so they'd be less uncomfortable, and began to talk. She'd do this whenever she wasn't trudging the mile there and back to the purple water to grab some more for all of them. She had so many cups and attempts at bottles that she didn't have to do this so often. She talked. She talked and talked and talked, more than she was ever known for.

She talked about how madly in love with Maria she was (she kept any R-rated details to herself, another of Maria's strange Terran expressions, so that in case Monica was somehow listening in, it wouldn't be weird). But she didn't care about Monica hearing that she was deeply in love with her
mother, more than she knew was possible, and that she spent every waking moment wishing she
could express it. She told Monica how deeply proud of her she was, and how she made her so
emotional, and how grateful she was. She talked about what she remembered of her childhood, all
the abuse and why she suspected it was why she was so closed off as an adult. She talked about not
knowing how to relate to people and how tough it was to understand all the speaking people
seemed to do without speaking at all.

She talked about as much of her time with the Kree as she remembered. She described everything
and everyone. If they were going to die, this was as pleasant as she could make it for them.

She was in the middle of a long rant about her father's obsessive love of Captain America and how
he forced her to watch all the old serials with his conspiracy theorist buddies when suddenly she
sensed something and jumped forward, terrified for her life but willing to die for the chance that
the Rambeaus could live.

Something, or someone, rather, was floating above her. All she could see in the purple glare of the
stars was a long flowing black cloak, something looking at her, head cocked in confusion.

"I will fight for my life," Carol said angrily, tensing her fists, letting out what little photon energy
she had.

"Strange, that is not why people usually come here," the figure said, not making any move to
attack. They regarded each other for a little while, before she let out a weak photon blast that went
right through it.

"That won't do anything, I'm afraid," the figure said, as it floated closer and Carol realized, to her
surprise, she recognized who this was, and fell backwards with a loud surprised yell, putting her
body between that of the Rambeaus, and this thing, it couldn't possibly be real, it couldn't--

"Pleasure to make your acquaintance," the figure said, stretching out a discolored hand as it floated
towards her.

"You may call me Johann Schmidt. I was once known, as you can see by my countenance, as the
Red Skull."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay! I've been feeling especially run down recently so I needed to take
a day and try to recharge a bit. I deal with a chronic illness (psoriatic arthritis) so I've
been going through treatment for that. Fun stuff.

Anyway! We're very near the end now, I'm suspecting 45 will be our last chapter and
then we'll have a somewhat brief 2 or 3 part epilogue and that'll be it!

The next two I'm considering is a lil yarn taking place on the raft starring everyone's
favorite from Ant-Man and the Wasp, Ghost(!) or one about a friend of the Hulk's
called Doc Samson. Both are going to try to try and be canon like this one, though Carol and
company are only supporting roles in one of them. Would love to hear a preference as
to which I tackle next, I've got outlines already that just need more detail!

Comments, suggestions, improvements, down below!
What Is Within Your Soul?

Chapter Summary

Carol has encountered a most unexpected visitor on the planet she's stranded on. With his help, she will hopefully survive this, but the consequences of her previous actions are about to be felt. Perhaps something will come of this after all, perhaps this is nearly over. Perhaps it is time to rest.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Johann, as he insisted he be called, had found the notion of needing sustenance quite hysterical, laughing for what felt like hours before he told Carol he'd help her find food in exchange for a game of chess.

Carol had scoffed. "I have no idea how to play that. I only remember it being played once."

"I shall teach you. I have spent so long playing myself. It gets quite boring when you've figured out every configuration and possible move of the game. Even an amateur like yourself would be welcome relief."

She sighed and agreed, and they set up the game on three boulders, one as a table and one for each of them to sit on (even if Johann could not really "sit" anymore, not having a corporeal ass to sit with). It was the principle of the thing.

"I'm going to be really bad at this," Carol warned him.

"No matter, we shall go slowly," Johann said.

Carol was, of course, aware of what a menace the guy had been decades before she was born. But in the present circumstances, this was not one she really wanted to mess with. They had a nice view of the purple ocean and the distant suns in the sky as he walked her through each of the pieces and their function, with an infinite amount of patience towards her mistakes. Maria and Monica floated next to them, every so often having one of them collect a bit of water, Carol with the photon energy and Johann with this strange inky tendril inside his cloak, to give them water.

Carol had eaten. The Rambeaus had kind of eaten. The only thing to eat, as far as Johann knew, were these strange things that seemed to be closest in relation to Terran fungi, which had sort of a bread-like texture, like a soft and barely cooked sort of dough, and even tasted kind of similar as well. When Carol had asked what it was, Johann had only laughed and said "manna from heaven, my dear." She could get the Rambeaus to open their mouths with Johann's help and manually close them over and over, manipulating the photon energy to get it down their throats without choking them, feeling so awful for doing so but also not wanting them to starve.

They played really slowly. The aim didn't seem to be winning. The aim simply seemed to be teaching her how to play it, and they were both so bored that it was at least something to pass the time. They could do that and have the purple-tinted waves crash behind them, which made things sound incredibly soothing, or at least as soothing as it could be given the present circumstances.
Since they had last fed the Rambeaus together, they had not said very much to each other. But eventually Johann did speak up even as he won his tenth game in a row with very little difficulty. He wasn't really seeming to rejoice each win, it just seemed very inevitable to him, and Carol didn't mind losing that many times if it did anything to keep her out of her own head.

"You are imbibed with the Tesseract, my dear."

"Excuse me?"

"You are imbibed with it. I can feel it as strongly as I can feel the wind against my face. I have not sensed one of them in a very long time until you and the Aether came through." The Aether rested next to Carol, who had discovered that once you transported to this home planet of the Xorrians, called Vormit according to Johann, it no longer had any real effect on you. Perhaps it sensed that she was imbibed with one of its siblings. Johann had held it for a little while and then handed it back, satisfied.

"How did you know it was the Tesseract?" Carol asked.

"The Tesseract was the one I once sought for myself, a very long time ago," Johann said, "I younger, foolish, deluded. Deeply insecure, obsessed with power and immortality. It has taken these numerous years of solitude to recognize my own inherent powerlessness over that of the universe. There are far stronger forces than you and I. There is always something or someone stronger."

"Then what's the point?"

"How would I know? I am no philosopher. You are seeing me after decades of solitude. I have not spoken aloud for longer than you have been alive, more than likely."

"Hmm" Carol said, trying not to think about the Rambeaus, and Johann moved his hand and the pieces, arranged in a checkmate for his side, moved back to their original positions. They would switch colors every time. The chess set had been one of the few objects to go along with him and he'd apparently spent decades memorizing every possible combination of chess piece to pass the time. But the unanswered question was--

"How are you like this?"

"My dear Miss Danvers, the Xorrian artifact you imbibe yourself with, willingly or otherwise, decides your fate. Each of them seem to predate civilization itself, at least from what mine has told me."

"You're imbibed with one?"

"Indeed. They are strange things. The Tesseract is to space what mine is to soul, the essence of existence itself. I am beyond and beneath all of existence now. Hence my appearance. Very difficult to explain, objects of such power can only be explained in abstract terms."

"So what does the Tesseract have to do with space?"

"I was never a scientist, only controlled scientists. Look what you can do. You can propel yourself through space, create matter out of seemingly nothing that you can manipulate for your purposes. I saw your little feat being able to survive a several mile drop with only bruising to show for it."

Carol groaned, because the bruising had been all over her back and legs and she'd apparently gotten some hairline fractures too in the process, but a fall of that height would've instantly killed anyone
else, broken them into paste.

"Something from nothing, my dear Miss Danvers. A fraction of a fraction of a fraction of almost infinite power within yourself, imagine if you could manipulate the space outside of yourself, transport across trillions of lightyears at once, contract and shape it how you pleased. No mortal could possibly do such a thing, just as someone who could control life itself could decide who lives and dies with the snap of a finger, controlling such a thing is immensely dangerous."

Carol moved a pawn two spaces like Maria had shown her, though a brief smirk from Johann suggested that perhaps she'd made the wrong move again. She didn't care, she wasn't paying much attention to the game, she was just happy to have company, even if that company had once been a Nazi.

"And you can't do that?"

"My dear, I was imbued with one as much as you were. I did not even know there were others till a few days ago. And that you and young Miss Rambeau were imbued with the same one...very interesting implications."

"I've got another question."

"I am, so to speak," Johann pulled back his hood and showed off his ear holes, "all ears."

Carol smirked and said, "why were you a Nazi?"

"Excuse me?"

"You were a Nazi. I've read up enough on them. Seemed like the absolute worst the Terrans had to offer. You killed a lot of people who did not deserve to die, and the only reason I haven't tried to kill you--"

"Despite such an effort being futile--"

"Despite such an effort being futile, is because you're the only thing keeping me alive. Am I sufficient to deserve to live? Is it because I'm imbued with an artifact? What if I'm a kind of person that Nazis like to kill?"

"Why would you be?"

"I'm gay," Carol said with a smile, "I don't know a damn thing about my background, I never checked, I could easily be Jewish or Romani or any of the people Nazis want to kill. I think it's worth addressing since we're going to be spending some time together."

Johann just smiled softly. "You know, Miss Danvers, it's not quite as straightforward as you're putting it."

"The whole 'let's kill this person because I've decided they're inferior' thing isn't straightforward? Do you deserve to be let off the hook for any of that? I've heard that before."

"No, no, that's not what I'm saying. I've had a lot of time to think about my previous actions, Miss Danvers. I spent the first few years agonizing over it, deeply lonely and miserable and unable to take my own life. I decided it must be karma for what I had done, for all I could see was all the people I had hurt. I rationalized. I made excuses. I said to myself that I was in the pursuit of something greater than life and if Hitler and all his sycophants wanted to kill whoever, that was acceptable, it was all worth it in the pursuit of greater."
"Enlighten me on where this is going."

"I have had decades to myself, I am not good at social interaction," Johann said, "I made the same excuses so many of the population ended up making. I looked the other way as people were taken on the trains. I had the power to stop it and I did nothing. Things did not change immediately. Germany had once been a very progressive nation. It was perhaps the most accepting of nations. But there was an undercurrent that was manipulated. Things changed slowly. At first certain people could not do one type of thing, and the grip slowly tightened to where it was no longer surprising to see people not allowed to own businesses or marry, then they were forced into the same quarters, then onto the trains, then forced into labor camps, death camps. All the while, I worked on my advancements, I reasoned that the technology my scientists would create would far outweigh the unfortunate sacrifices that had to be made. I made excuses, I killed, I made excuses and I killed and a whole society of people who knew they would never be targeted did what I did. The same thing happens in the country you're from, the way they victimize and persecute those they deem unacceptable."

"I would hardly say--"

"You have not studied your own history enough. You are given some credit, for this whole Kree business seems to have boggled your mind, but when you get back there--"

"--If I get back."

"When, my dear Miss Danvers. You will not be here forever. You are not forced to stay here like me. Anyway, the history of every country is arranged just so in order to cover up its worst misdeeds. How many of your schools are named after Confederate generals or slavers? Are people like yourself, homosexuals--"

"Gay, queer, you decide. Not that word."

"My apologies. Regardless, you are not allowed to marry, you are not allowed to adopt children in most cases, you are subjected to constant harassment and bigotry and someone without your capabilities lives their lives in a great deal of physical danger. I am not about to say that I did not contribute to such things in my own country. I simply allowed it to happen. This does not let me off the hook, so to speak, this is not to say I haven't done numerous unspeakable things in the name of progress or had thousands die by my hands. I have done so many awful things. I am not forgiven for those things. I will never be redeemed for those things. But that does not mean your country has been especially pleasant for everyone. If you wish to identify as a different gender than what you were born as, even worse than before. I am fully aware of these things and what we did. Unthinkable, unspeakable. Do you have mental illness on top of that? Treated even worse. A disability of some kind? Even worse. That is not one country, that is every country."

His voice got louder and louder as the rant continued until Carol held a knight up between two fingers staring very wide-eyed at him, having no idea how to react to this outpouring of emotion, mixtures of anger and shame and fury coming from him.

"I contributed. I was part of the problem. I've had decades to pour over every detail and analyze all the ways I hurt people. All I could do, the only way left to contribute, was to look after this planet and the stone I am connected to in any way I could. I have done great wrongs and that'll never go away. But goodness, I think, is not something that redeems the bad things you've done. It can only be done without recognition and without certainty it'll amount to anything. It is, in its way, its own form of faith, but a faith without a god."

Carol placed the knight back down on the board and took one of his pawns, the first time in ten
whole games that she'd been able to take a single piece from him. Even though the move probably had no long term potential, Johann still let out a toothy grin at this and began to laugh, despite how tense it had just been.

"Took you long enough, Miss Danvers."

"I guess."

Johann looked over to the Rambeaus, next to each other on two mounds of sand, still fast asleep but at least not looking quite as frail as they had been before, and noticed Carol's wistful glance in their direction, and said "you know, something that people had always noted about me was that I never connected to anyone else. I always remained alone."

"We'd have that in common, then."

"Something changed, did it not?"

"I guess."

"What changed?"

"I don't know. I've known Maria since we were little kids. Wish I could remember more of it. She was the only one who would ever take a chance on me, before all of this. I didn't get...this...because I was destined to or because I was a person of importance. I was just there when the energy core was and here we are. Somehow, the pilot with no future became this."

"I had always determined that connecting with another person was a sign of weakness. Funny, because people always assumed I had been treated badly as a child. On the contrary, I grew up in one of the wealthiest families in all of Germany. The Schmidts were a proud military family, minor aristocracy, and eagerly joined Hitler's cause the second we got the chance. I had every single thing a child could ever ask for as a child. I did not suffer. The other boys always wanted my approval for I had more than all of them put together. Despite the immense wealth inherited from previous generations, my parents were always convinced they didn't have enough, and that if it wasn't for the Jews or whoever else, that we would be truly rich, we'd be able to have two mansions instead of one."

"You sounded very spoiled," Carol said with a small giggle.

"Indeed," Johann said, "I was convinced I was the pinnacle of genetic superiority. It made me feel so good despite all I had, because the wealthiest in our country were always convinced there was something more. Easier to lay blame elsewhere than acknowledge the flaws within ourselves, that emptiness. Better to keep it all to yourself like a dragon's hoard as opposed to giving it to others who needed it."

"And so you've spent decades realizing you were wrong."

"It was not just I, it was the stone. It is the essence of life itself, as you know. They can speak to one another when they are near, and they can speak to the part of you imbibed with it. The Aether has been talking to mine ever since it got here. They badly missed each other, and desire to see one another. They miss you and I as well. All they want is to be together again, except being able to reunite would in turn threaten many lives. The irony in these ultimate weapons, driven by desire to be near one another."

"Can I see the stone?"
"No," said Johann, and Carol's face fell, "but I can get you as close to it as I can."

They floated softly up the mountain together, Maria and Monica tagging along, held softly by Carol's photon energy. They moved quite slowly, just observing the miles of empty space around them, the massive size of the ocean before them, but also because Carol was still feeling weak and couldn't go all that fast yet. Finally, they arrived at the summit, where it had been carved into a sort of platform that went into a massive several mile drop down below to a ravine.

"This is it?" Carol asked, moving her hands and softly placing the Rambeaus on the ground.

"This is it," said Johann.

"I don't get it, where's the stone?"

"You see, that's the defense mechanism. In order to be granted access to it, you've got to sacrifice someone you love."

Carol blanched. "Fuck that."

"Excuse me?"

"That's not worth it."

"Not worth power over life itself?"

"Absolutely not," Carol said with conviction, "That's a horrible trade."

"Absolute power is a horrible trade?"

"Yes," said Carol, not normally certain but very certain now, "who needs absolute power when you have them?" She nodded over without thinking to the Rambeaus, those ordinary Rambeaus in the grand scheme of things.

Johann stared slack-jawed at her for several seconds, and then burst into hysterical laughter, his teeth clattering against each other from the lack of use, floating to the ground and even going underneath it slightly, phasing through below, his laugh reverberating around the entire mountain, Carol blushing slightly but glaring vaguely in his direction. After several seconds, he phased back through and composed himself once more.

"My dear Miss Danvers," Johann said, "that is the most refreshing answer anyone has ever given."

"You said you haven't talked in decades."

"I haven't," he said, "but it's my job to direct people who want to go for the stone. Many people hear of it and desire it and they bring their spouses and their loved ones and their children and their pets. Look down."

Carol crawled to the edge of the cliff and looked down, and at first she only saw the ravine, and then the clouds began to part and her hands went to her mouth. Fully revealed were hundreds if not thousands of bones, bones of every kind of species you could imagine, many of which she'd never seen before. Some were clearly quite small, a lot of them were shattered, some were bodies dried up and mummified by the whistling winds, some reaching out, mouths contorted into screams.

She crab walked backwards and her back hit the rock behind her. She had to repress the urge to
vomit out everything she'd just eaten, heaving for breath. It was ironic, because she had killed before, plenty of times, but part of being Kree was never having to look at the bodies after the fact, never looking at the pain and the anguish, the reason that person opposed you. Zen-Pram she didn't feel so bad about, that had been a mercy kill. But who knows how many mindless Kree drones she'd just taken out, for the greater good? Hopefully so, god she couldn't live with herself--

"That is what some people do for power, that is the sacrifice they're willing to make. Do you see now? Do you see what people will do when they are able to give in to their base impulses, value themselves over all others? They have converted life itself into a statistic and treated it as such, but because you are the first to react such a way, I will tell you a secret."

Carol, her breath calming slightly, looked up at him and said "What?"

"You must not share it with anyone."

"I promise." She stuck out her pinky, like she'd seen Monica do once, and Johann smiled and wrapped his bony pinky around hers.

"The stone commands me to allow anyone who arrives who has the sacrifice to allow them a chance to have possession of them."

"Okay?"

"However, there is a rule it does not mention, the secret failsafe should someone with ill intentions somehow get it."

"What's that?"

"They will be compelled to lose."

"I don't understand."

"You see, the only way someone can get the stone and truly have access to its full power is to make the sacrifice willingly. Everyone involved must get to choose to do so of their own volition. Otherwise, you'll get it, but you will doom yourself to a slow and painful death at its hands. I've seen it happen before. Time and time again the stone has been taken, time and time again it has been returned to me. Then their soul joins me here, forever. You have not seen that yet. I hope you never do."

Carol almost heard something then, whispers, something below her. She looked down and saw the mountain almost vibrating slightly, the voices that she couldn't make out but she had a feeling she knew what they were. Johann noticed and smiled and said, "the ones down there are those who deserve to be there."

She heard something else, but it wasn't coming from the mountain itself, it was coming from where they had just flown from, near the cave, and she realized it had been so long that she'd actually forgotten that sound and how she had designed it (with some help from her datapad) that it could contact her from lightyears away and--

"We need to go back down right now," she said, and Johann moved to carry the Rambeaus and they both jumped from the cliff and began to quickly float down in the direction of the noise.

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She hit the ground and ran as fast as she could, Johann floating behind her, carrying one Rambeau
over each shoulder, and it was the damn beeper. Carol actually dived at it and grabbed it and hit the receiver and--

"Carol? Carol?"

She let out a loud yell in response.

"Carol? Mate?"

All she could do was sob and whisper "oh my god" over and over as Johann floated idly by.

"Carol?"

"Talos!"

"Holy fucking shit, Carol!"

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After that commotion, they had quickly set up camp and Johann lit a fire, somehow, despite having no wood and no kindling, and they roasted the strange fungus that tasted vaguely like warm dough, and Carol contacted Talos.

"How long has it been for you, mate?"

"I'm not sure. We were trapped inside Hala for a while, and then that idiot Zen-Pram tried to activate the Aether, and it took us to--"

"Vormir," Johann said helpfully.

"Yeah, that."

"Vormir?" Talos said, and went silent for a few seconds. "Oh, that's very far."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Carol my love, you know how most of the habitable planets we know of are all in the Spiral Arms of the Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies, as you Terran lot refer to them?"

"Yeah?"

"That one, that one is much farther away, shall we say. A good several million light years away from any other system."

"It's a planet that doesn't want to be found," Johann said.

"Mate, who is that?"

"I'll explain later," Carol said.

"We'll definitely spare no expense to come and get you, but it might take...a minute. We have to figure out how to even make that many jumps without killing ourselves in the process. It's not even technically a part of any galaxy, it's literally a planet floating by itself millions of light years in empty space below the Milky Way and whatever galaxy is next."

"And that can be done?"
"With enough time and calculation, sure. But it needs to be done right so we can get there and back. Are the Rambeaus with you?"

"Yeah," Carol said, "They've been unconscious for a while, I've been taking care of them. I've been completely overwhelmed with everything that's been going on."

"I can imagine," Talos said, "Soren and Yesereth would love to see you, but they're not here. They're...well, a lot has happened. Yesereth is fully grown now."

"Oh god," Carol said.

"Yeah, but I don't know the exact Terran metric, so I'd call Fury about that. We've both been trying to call you every day, at least once a day, and we'd concluded a while back that you and the Rambeaus had died."

"I'm so sorry," Carol said.

"Don't be," Talos said, "we've been through this before, haven't we? Time and space work funny when you're involved. We'll settle all of that later, but right now, I want you to call Fury. Ease his mind. He's had a rough few years."

"But he's safe? He's alive? What about Frigga?"

"Frigga's alive too, she keeps telling us we'll know when she dies. She's very certain when she'll die but won't tell us."

"OK, I'll call Fury, and then I'll call you back and hopefully I can talk to the others. I've missed you so goddamn much, Talos."

"I've missed you too, mate," Talos said, "I'll explain everything when I see you. We'll keep you posted. Just be patient."

He clicked off, and Carol then had to mentally prepare herself for the next call.

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"Welcome to 2007," Fury said a few minutes later, sounding more exhausted than ever.

In the minutes it had taken for Carol to mentally prepare herself, terrified that Fury would be mad at her, even if she couldn't entirely identify why he might be mad, Talos had called Fury. So that meant he responded in the most Fury of ways.

"Wait, what?"

"Well, it seems as though you did the thing again."

"Yeah," Carol said blankly. He sounded so angry, but not necessarily directed at her.

"Look, I'm sure Talos warned you that a lot has been going on."

"Yeah, I couldn't be of any help since I keep...skipping through time," Carol laughed because it did sound so silly to say out loud, and then she heard Fury let out a little chuckle at that, and it seemed that he hadn't entirely vanished into self-seriousness just yet.

"That is a problem. I'm sure what's been going on with you has been much more serious."
"Well, I, um, killed the Supreme Intelligence."

"Hey!" Fury sounded enthusiastic for the first time during the call, "here I was spending all this time preparing for a counterattack, I've never been so glad to hear I was wasting my time. But then again, I already suspected that might've been your handiwork."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, several weeks after the attack on Zen-Whoberi, the Skrulls came back, without you. We didn't have a funeral since there was no way to confirm whether or not you'd all lived. But soon after, while Talos and Soren were recovering, suddenly they both get a distress signal and it's Khn'nr, that bastard, whooping and cheering, because the Supreme Intelligence had died."

"I never did figure out the aftermath of that, I haven't had time."

"Suddenly billions of Kree are left without any way to know what to do next. They've all been assimilated, and it turns out that only the Skrulls have the resources to be able to begin figuring out where they all came from and began to try and bring them back to where they originally came from. So many planets, but it gave the Skrulls a collective purpose they hadn't before. They've gotten very good at it in the last five years. Naturally, quite a bit of them weren't so eager for that, they still wanted to be Kree. One of them, one that Talos is really not fond of, called Ronan, declared himself the new Supreme Intelligence and a few billion or so fucked up with him god knows where, and they've been a real problem. But the vast majority wanted back to their old lives. So many of them had been significantly traumatized by the programming. It became a galactic crisis I couldn't tell anyone else about at SHIELD. There wasn't really anything I can do. But there was someone with me who could do something about it."

"Una!" Carol said excitedly, then looking at Johann, nervous that he felt ignored, but for his part he softly floated above the fire and smiled warmly at the chance to listen to human interaction again.

"That's right," Fury said, the smile in his tone evident, "she went right back to Hala and she began to treat people herself. This whole wave of Kree followed, Kree trying to help out Kree, trying to figure out their old lives and who they'd once been. It's become this whole effort and the whole of the Supreme Intelligence's fortune of every currency you can imagine has been used for this initiative. Not like it's going to be needing it anytime soon. It had actually become the wealthiest being in the Spiral Arms, as Talos refers to it."

"What about Soren and Yesereth? They weren't with Talos when I called them."

"Yesereth," Fury said, "has been really busy in the last few years. Her mind melding is like nothing else, and so people have flocked over to Hala from all over to be able to speak with her and have their heads sorted. You'd think she'd get arrogant from all the attention, but she's the same old Yesereth. She's missed all of you, Monica especially."

"Wait," Carol said, giving the sleeping Monica a confused look, "I didn't even think--"

"Look," Fury said, "I wouldn't broach that just yet. There's a lot to sort out. As for Talos and Soren, they're actually on Hala right now, leading a lot of the efforts themselves. Funny that two warriors would become such hardcore peacekeepers, but life will do unexpected things when you're not thinking about it. Ronan and his cronies probably aren't too happy about that, but they wouldn't dare try picking a fight like that. They're probably one of the last confirmed threats the Kree truly possess."
"What have you been up to, Fury?" Carol asked. "We never talked about you."

"Well," Fury said, "I spent five years calling you every day and silently praying to whoever would listen that you and Maria and Monica would be alright. I spent five years missing you dearly, all three of you. I spent five years wondering it took so much of my life until I could meet people like you and feel connected to others at the first time. I sure as hell don't fall asleep holding Coulson's hand."

Carol laughed, much harder than she was expecting.

"A lot has happened here, none of which are things you're going to blame yourself for. We went to war again, another pointless proxy war, and a lot of good men and women have died for no reason other to make oil companies rich and engage in our worst biases, and I said as much when Pierce asked me for my opinion on things. SHIELD has stayed entirely out of that one. There was a really awful hurricane in New Orleans a couple years ago--"

"Is Frank alright?"

"Yes, he's fine. I'm getting to him. His whole house and fire department was destroyed, his family was pretty devastated, but overall what's left of Monica's family is more or less alright. Maria's home was unfortunately destroyed as well, I can't do anything about that. All I could do was send in SHIELD agents to recover as much of its contents as possible before the flooding got really bad, so all the pictures and the journals and everything are more or less okay."

"She's not gonna like that, if she wakes up."

"No, she won't. But she'll be provided for, all three of you will be. None of you will ever want for anything ever again."

"I don't know about that--"

"No buts, Carol Danvers. I've had enough of you being proud and refusing help. I've waited five years to tell you off for that and now I'm going to do that. I love you, so you need help. Just because you can fly doesn't mean you're invincible."

Carol sighed softly. "I'm not good at accepting praise."

"None of us are. But I remember when a superpowered noble warrior hero became the reason I have a career, so it's time to pay back that debt I've been agonizing over."

"God, I can't believe the Supreme Intelligence thought that was a clever descriptor."

"Yeah, well, we can't all be smart. Talos told me he's gonna take care of transport, but I need you to make me a promise."

"What's that?"

"Call me every day. Just once. At least until you're at Hala or Earth or wherever you decide to go. But until then, I need to know that you're safe, and plus I just want to talk to you for a while, at least while things are relatively calm."

"Okay," Carol said, smiling, "I'd like that."
Longest chapter yet! It's official: the next one is going to be the last one before our rather short epilogue begins and then I'll have to bid Carol and the Rambeaus adieu for now.

As I said previously, the next two I'm considering is one about Ghost from *Ant-Man and the Wasp* and Doc Samson, so let me know if you have a preference between the two. Carol and company will be supporting roles in one of them in a way that I think makes sense, but you'll have to guess which one!

Anyway! Hope you've enjoyed, we're very close to the endgame now.

- G
Higher, Further, Faster

Chapter Summary

It's time for some tearful goodbyes, though with the promise of everyone getting to see each other again. The death of the Supreme Intelligence has given the known galaxy the briefest of respites, the briefest of moments for everyone to collectively gather their breath before the next threat. There are people to be rehabilitated, lives to be saved, and being a hero is not always about punching. Sometimes it's about doing the right thing, expecting nothing in return.

That being said, there's always another complication on the way.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Fate was so kind as to give Carol the briefest of respites after that. The death of the Supreme Intelligence had created a vacuum that very few were willing to openly try to fill. The last remaining Titan observed the death of the army he had contracted with some amusement, as their reputation had thoroughly not proceeded them at all. They had certainly won Zen-Whoberi, but out of the half of the population that remained, many were able to eventually return to their home planet and rebuild with help from the Skrulls and whatever help Frigga could convince her royal family to provide. Thanos would later claim that the prosperity they enjoyed afterwards was because of his slaughter, perpetually convinced that he was the single source of divinity in all the universe.

The Kree had been a name spoken of in hushed tones and aside from Ronan's contingent, the rest just wanted to rebuild their lives. They would get to do so. The actual end of the fight had not been Carol killing the Supreme Intelligence, the ending had been a massive civil war that had taken several months to resolve, between those who wanted freedom and those who continued to wish to live in delusion even as its influence hurt them greatly. Most conflicts turn out like this. Carol may have accidentally lit the fuse, but it was the choice of those individual people to take it to the end. Carol made no attempt to turn the narrative to her favor later on. She had not the slightest interest in manipulating the story for fame and fortune. She was content to remain a somewhat abstract fixture in the universe, sussing out intergalactic conflicts and doing what she could to assist. She would discover that in the years to follow, until she would finally return to C-53 for longer than a couple days at a time in 2018 after the ultimate tragedy, that she was not doing a whole lot of fighting anymore. She and Monica kept themselves well trained and worked as a unit, their three favorite Skrulls tagging along whenever needed, which for the sake of emotional support, was almost always.

 Mostly they brought supplies to those in need, anything to provide any creature who needed it with the basic requirements for survival. They helped communities arm and train themselves to serve as autonomous units. They became known more as intergalactic diplomats than as warriors, though they could certain hold their own if need be. They'd both learned long ago that violence was only the last resort, and direct action in service of those who couldn't defend themselves always had longer lasting positive effects.
Maria tagged along, she had no choice but to tag along. The remainder of her days was spent with the two women she loved most. She hadn't realized how much she had hated life on her home planet save the two of them and Fury. With the ability to go anywhere, to pilot the Skrull ship gifted to them as a thanks for all their service to them, they could go anywhere in the Spiral Arms they needed to. The rest of the known galaxy didn't frown on their union for arbitrary reasons like C-53 did. She and Carol could walk around the metal walkways of Xandar hand in hand and not get the slightest glare in response. It was everything they dreamed of and more. After almost two decades, the two could finally be a couple.

Of course, this is not to say that it was a completely happy ending for them. They were immensely lucky that none of them ended up being taken out by Thanos' snap aside from Fury himself. They mourned him, not knowing then he could be easily brought back with the right set of circumstances. Carol and Monica, privately, mourned the destruction of the Tesseract, despite all the pain it had caused, their connection to it severed permanently, though the powers remained as strong as ever.

A month would pass in between the call to Talos and the Skrull ship arriving on Vormir with the assistance of a Rainbow Bridge. Frigga wanted the return of the Aether to herself personally, to be returned to Svartalfheim as it was decreed, and she would oversee this herself. They had to make their introductions to Johann and have a long talk about his role in things and whether or not he could be convinced to never let anyone else use the artifact he had been imbued with. The discussions took place on the same beach where Carol and Johann had passed the weeks playing numerous games of chess.

Carol did not attend these meetings for Maria and Monica had finally woken up. More or less alright, but ravenously hungry. There was no tearful reunion this time, all of them were far too exhausted for it. She had apologized profusely for failing them yet again, and then Maria smiled and took her head in her hands and said very quietly, "we were listening the whole time."

Carol, normally one to offer some kind of self-deprecatign response after receiving praise, simply smiled very softly.

The contingent of Asgardians, Skrulls and the one guardian of a Xorrian artifact would return to the cave to see Monica doing loop-de-loops in the air, asking who the scary red guy was. They would then see Carol and Maria on a dirt mound, entangled in each other's arms. Unconscious, but holding onto each other tightly.

Johann and Monica spent quite a while talking after that. Johann was quite curious, he had never interacted much with the younger ones even when he had been a proper Terran, and Monica was curious by the evil guy who Captain America had defeated. They got into a lot of the ethics of a Nazi wanting to reform himself and wanting to do better for however long he existed. The two would end up becoming fast friends, as would he be to all of them, former Nazism aside. The unspoken agreement was that he would never be off the hook for all the atrocities he committed in life, but perhaps he could be something more useful now. Johann agreed. He lamented that he had an infant child on Earth when he had first been transported and she was likely very old herself now. He could only futilely hope that his daughter, who he had named Sinthea ("Not Cynthia," he said angrily in response to a wiseass comment from Monica), would not follow in his footsteps and go along a better path.

"There is no shame in an ordinary life," Johann said to the three of them later, after the Skrulls and Frigga had decided to stay on Vormir for a couple days to take in the sights. "I wish I had only known the pleasures of a life such as that."
Carol, having had enough adventure for fifty lifetimes, could not enthusiastically agree more.

The reunion between Carol and the Skrulls were very awkward at first. Five years had gone by with no resolution, what they'd had years to process, she'd only had months. Yesereth let her own feelings be known on the matter by mindmelding with Carol and passing on an overwhelming feeling of relaxation and calm, telling her mentally how happy she was to see her.

Emotions were heavy. It had always been something the Kree discouraged, that emotion nonsense, yet everyone was so incredibly overjoyed to see each other that it was difficult to contain. Monica had responded to Yesereth suddenly appearing by pressing her mouth against hers, even if it hadn't really been that kind of mouth press. Luckily, no one else was there to see it, aside from Carol watching the perimeter from above, who played very dumb and only smirked a little. It was clear that the two didn't have the same kind of chemistry that she and Maria had, but she sure as hell was going to let the Skrull's parents discover that on their own.

Talos and Soren, as sort of an apology without having to say so, asked Johann to give everyone else the grand tour of the place, and ever so conveniently forgot to ask Carol and Maria to go with them. They were gone for several hours and the only indication that they had forgotten them on purpose came later when they were all eating dinner and they suddenly heard Fury loudly laughing until he sounded like he'd damn near peed himself on Soren's communicator as she snuck a cheeky look at them. Far too exhausted to be embarrassed (but not too exhausted to be left alone for several hours), they both gave her the finger in unison. Monica, perpetually oblivious, had no idea why the three of them were suddenly bickering like this.

Johann, despite his long separation from the rest of humanity, was no fool, and only laughed in his clattering manner.

As far as Fury was concerned, he'd spent years trying to track the fallout of the college lab in Virginia he'd been tracking. All the experimentation done by Ross had backfired in a big way. His daughter and her boyfriend had been scientists recruited for the illicit project and it had resulted in someone being exposed to their attempt at replicating the Super-Soldier Serum, something called gamma radiation (though Maria pointedly said that this couldn't be the same one naturally found in space). The daughter's boyfriend had been the one exposed, and instead of becoming another Captain America, he morphed into a giant green version of himself whenever his adrenaline got too high (most especially during feelings of intense anger and stress), and had been chased all over the place. Fury's main concern was making sure Ross and his paramilitary contractors never got to him, trying to steer this Bruce Banner as far away from populated areas as possible. From observation of the beast, which Ross kept referring to as "The Hulk," this thing was actually not violent at all unless provoked, so better to leave him alone. It migrated from Virginia all the way to Rio De Janeiro in a country called Brazil (Carol decided to research it in a library next time she visited C-53), and there Fury kept tabs on it, making sure it didn't activate itself again, taking over a failing soda bottle company and getting as many SHIELD agents as possible to pretend to be employees. This would work for only so long until they were forced to hire legit employees to keep up appearances and one of these assholes would pick a fight with Banner in some kind of attempt at a dick-measuring contest of sorts, starting things all over again.

Despite every attempt to find a way in which he could finagle the situation so he could kill Ross, the fucker had a lot of connections in high places and eventually it was Pierce and the World Security Council who defended his actions, despite how many people he had killed in the process. Fury stifled any rage he felt towards the man, but also refused to provide SHIELD assistance at any point. The more he observed Banner, the more he realized the thing inside him could be quite useful against the sorts of threats he couldn't always rely on Carol and the Rambeaus to be able to defuse. That old file he'd made based on finding others like her was updated to include him.
It ended up being time to go. They all bid Johann adieu and promised to visit as soon as they could. Frigga took back the Aether with her own contingent and headed back to the Nine Realms to resolve that situation without her children knowing.

They would not head back to Earth for another year. They would go to Hala, and they would spend a lot of their time helping her former Kree compatriots with the help of the Skrulls and Una, who was absolutely overjoyed to see them. The five years that had passed had been fruitful and many Kree had gotten their old lives back or were able to forge new ones. They could never help the ones who decided to keep on their mission of desecration and joined Ronan's cause, and the Accusers would begin targeting the Xandarians exclusively, too enthralled by power to ever reconsider their ways. Carol and the Rameaus and the Skrulls had to fight them on many occasions, but for all that Ronan did wrong, he was a much craftier one than given credit for, and his forces were always able to slip away. All they could manage was keeping him in deep space as long as they could, while they survived on perpetuating resources. Carol's old ally Korath would be a particular thorn in her side for quite a while.

But they would eventually head back to C-53 to visit Fury for a few days, who had kept Madam Carter and Agent Buchanan updated on everything, and the latter of them seemed strangely satisfied with the way everything was going.

Perhaps it would be best to visit them again, because something very unexpected would happen in the year 2008, so fast and so quick that by the time Carol had dropped her obligations on Hala to come screeching out of the atmosphere, all she could do was confront Fury, completely blindsided by the impulsive thing he had just done.

Fury's first response was to show her a Terran news briefing, with a man in a beard she did not recognize, and then he said four words that were so unbelievably stupid that Carol retroactively forgave herself for every mistake she'd ever made.

"I am Iron Man."

END OF PART ONE

Chapter End Notes

It's over!

So, I want to specify that our Part 2 is going to be much shorter than this, and is something of a somewhat brief epilogue to our heroes and interactions I wish we could've seen. Probably won't be more than a couple "chapters" and it's meant to correct a major qualm I have with certain MCU movies, namely the one where CAROL WAS BARELY IN IT!! To be fair, this isn't changing the canon that's already there, just trying to expand what little we saw of certain people.

Anyway, thank you so much to everyone who has joined us this far along, I hope I can convince you to stick around a tiny little while longer before our epilogue is properly concluded. I have made some last minute changes and let me promise you this: after a certain point, it goes in a direction I did not expect, that I hope you enjoy.
- G
Epilogue, Part 1: 2008-2018

Chapter Summary

Ten years, ten long years. A lot to be done in ten years. A lot to mourn in ten years.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

2008

"So he killed his own CEO?"

"Yes."

"And you just went and talked to him?"

"Carol, he has a metal suit. And this metal suit can do some really cool shit. And you said to call you only for emergencies so I'm trying to figure out how to call you as infrequently as possible."

Carol just stared dumbfounded at Fury. This was the stupidest possible thing he could've done. She had meant emergencies. A billionaire putting on a suit of armor and tearing up Los Angeles, and then the billionaire whose dad had made the company the two were fighting over had his own suit, and he'd killed the guy in full view of the city's population. Carol had never, in all her years, fucked up quite as publicly as that. Then, to top it off, the jackass had gone on live television and announced to the world that he was in fact the guy in the metal suit who had just killed another billionaire.

"I should kill him."

"No you should not. No one else knows how to pilot the thing."

"I said an emergency. Jesus Christ, Fury--"

"Oh, you finally learned who that was."

"Yeah, dead Jewish carpenter god. I've known for a while. He's weird. Works as a euphemism. Point being, this guy is really dangerous and we have to strangle the baby while it's in the cradle."

"You've been mishearing Maria's references again."

"No I haven't."

"That's not all you've been mishearing," Fury said while winking his remaining eye, and if they weren't sitting outside of Fury's favorite coffee shop, on a nice patio with their little ceramic glasses in hand, Carol would've probably photon blasted him.

"Shut up. Can't I enjoy Terran customs in peace?"

"Sure you can. More than once every time, I hope."
"You," Carol said, trying not to blush, really hating him for it, "this isn't funny."

"You've been together for like, what, almost ten years now? How are you still going high schooler over her? What's your secret?"

"Really good, um, customs."

"Ha!" Fury, ever the secret gossip, lifted his coffee mug to Carol's and clinked it. "That's all it takes, I guess. Anyway, the answer is no, I'm not killing the billionaire. He can be useful."

"Useful how?"

"Useful in that I need others like you around when you're not. I will not let one of my best friends be the only source of intergalactic protection this planet has, and that's final. He's got a metal suit that fires laser beams. He's got the potential to implement clean energy cheaply and efficiently across the planet."

"Billionaires are not known for their generosity unless it's for a photo op."

"Well, then let's give him a good reason to want an extra special one. I'm gonna find more. I've already got at least four."

"Four?"

"Yeah, four. As in four people who could be a team to put together for times you're not here."

"Who else?"

"Well, you remember the crazy shit with that lab in Virginia?"

"Sure, you were dealing with that when I was dealing with Zen-Pram."

"When we were dealing with Zen-Pram. Anyway, the guy behind that was this asshole general I don't have enough dirt on called Thaddeus Ross, and get this, he infects the guy dating his daughter with gamma radiation in order to make a second Captain America."

"You're shitting me."

"Completely serious. Anyway, daughter's boyfriend gets real big and real green and angry, so he contracts us out to hunt the poor bastard down while he makes himself out to be the victim. If you wanna kill someone, you kill Thaddeus Ross for me. Pain in my dick."

"Be careful, I just might."

"But daughter's boyfriend was the first one in consideration, especially because as long as he's not in populated areas and isn't antagonized, he's pretty much harmless. I think you'd like him. Bruce Banner is his name."

"What about the second one?"

"Second and third you've met. Have a lot of combatants who have some extra special stuff and two of them are on my personal list of who to turn to when things go bad. Romanoff and Barton, remember them?"

"The Soviet? I don't remember Barton."
"You met him really briefly once. Natural with a bow and arrow."

"And that's...useful."

"Seriously, it's great."

"A bow and arrow?"

"Yeah!"

"Fury, this is life and death of the planet, not the fucking Olympics."

"No no, that one is where you and Maria compete."

Carol slapped him lightly on the shoulder, causing Fury to cackle. Whenever it had been too long between visits, he'd just devolve into constant wisecracks about what she and Maria did privately.

"I still fail to see how he compares to Big Angry Guy."

"Look, all I'm saying is, he's unique."

"Or, he's someone you're sweet on because he's another Wounded Boy with a Score To Settle," Carol said dismissively.

"Just you watch, he'll be useful."

"Fine, who's the fourth?"

"Well before Stark, it was gonna be you. But Stark is probably the fourth. I've got very few options. I need more raw brute strength on the team, I need a freaking god or something."

"I do know a couple of them, but I doubt they could be convinced to come here."

2011

"You know, it's been a hell of a year for you guys."

"Yeah, I don't want to hear it."

"Sure you didn't want my help?"

"Completely, there were no casualties. Town in New Mexico blown to bits, maybe. But nobody died. I'm subtly sending in funds to help everyone rebuild so nobody is displaced, no harm, no foul."

They had taken to meeting in the same place every time she visited, the timing of which was never consistent. You never knew when a situation with one of Ronan's cruisers might pop up in civilized space, or when there was a crisis on Hala that needed defusing. Having been at it for a few years, the longest she'd ever gone with no time skips and hoping such a thing would never happen again, she'd settled into a nice rhythm. Fury had even recommended a therapist who she'd see once a month with the Rambeaus, a former colleague of Banner's called Skivorski, who had himself been exposed to gamma radiation. She didn't always see him as a group, they'd see him in his office in Tulsa, Oklahoma either individually or together. For the first time, she was getting to truly process everything. She didn't have to pay a cent, Fury was funding the whole effort, even if so far Carol
and the Rambeaus were the only ones actually seeing him that Fury knew. The only fair thing to do had been to open it up to the public and provide free counseling to anyone who needed it, even if Dr. Skivorski's time was limited.

Interestingly enough, only Banner himself had actually seen him on a couple occasions while still on the run from the law. Everyone else Fury had been intending to send to him flatly kept on refusing.

The big news was the one who needed it the most. Steven Goddamn Rogers, still alive. The actual intention had been to find the ship he'd crashed and see if any traces of the Tesseract remained while it was under supervision, but then they'd found his hibernating body, one of the unexpected effects of the Super-Soldier Serum.

And that was a few months after Thor had made his first public appearance on C-53. Carol had found that whole business hysterical, even if she was getting reports from a strangely calm Frigga that Loki had tried to fake his own death or some business like that. Carol had warned Fury about the little zit, because he'd always given her a distasteful vibe the few times since that they had interacted, but Fury was largely blowing that off and there wasn't much more she could do.

"You should've seen Coulson, he's having the time of his life."

"I bet. Still the same ass-kisser as ever?"

"That ass-kisser is loyal."

"Loyal like a dog."

"That's not how the expression goes, Carol dear."

They were drinking coffee out in public like two normal people, somewhat fancy place at that. Fury looked happier than he'd been in years, vindicated probably, at his chance to collect these people like toys and have them try and protect the planet.

"Are you sure the Tesseract should stay here and not go with me?"

"And make you a target? You kidding me? It's secure, it's hidden away and no one's gonna be able to find it. That thing is staying there for the rest of time, even if Goose really misses being able to eat it whenever she wants."

Goose, for her part, curled up in Fury's lap and purred, giving a loving gaze towards the saucer of milk Fury had been able to procure from the establishment. Funny that for all the two-legs she liked to eat, something about that cow liquid really did the pocket dimension in her stomach some good.

"How's Maria?"

"Still on Hala. She's really taken to Kree crafts and their repair, converting some of the warships for civilian purposes. Honestly, if you'd told me before that she'd have a real knack for that kind of liquid metal, I never would've believed it. She's doing great. Monica's taking care of the lot of the stuff I can't reach, the Skrulls are still on their wacky misadventures as always."

"You tell 'em to stop by sometime, I miss them a lot. They'll get a free lunch on me. Also, Madam Carter and Agent Buchanan want to see you. The minute Rogers was discovered, they started acting strange. Then again, Carter used to be real sweet on him and suddenly the guy comes back decades after her marriage. Must be a real knock to the old senses, if you ask me."
"How's Buchanan taking it?"

"Surprisingly well. I don't think the man is capable of feeling jealousy, though he and Carter seem to be avoiding him for some reason. If I was sweet on some hunk of man like that, I sure as hell wouldn't be hiding, but what do I know?"

Carol laughed, raised her glass, and took a sip of the chai Fury had insisted she drink, and had to note that he had much better taste in this than she did.

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2012

"You can't be serious?"

"Why is it that every single year, you tell me that at least once?"

"It was my callsign! Maria picked it as a goof, she said it made me sound intimidating but everyone kept calling me 'Hamlet!'"

"Why were they doing that?"

"Because he was the guy whose uncle killed his dad and then hooked up with his mom and then he killed his uncle and everyone died, everyone got revenge on everyone else and I kept falling asleep when Maria tried to read it to me recently!"

"Maria reads to you?"

"I dunno, it's a weird thing we do. Sometimes I read to her, but I'm not nearly as good at it. The language still isn't completely back."

"Sure as hell back as far as speaking goes."

Carol playfully slapped Fury for that one. They were not at a coffee shop this time, they were at the New York branch of SHIELD, where she'd nearly been killed by Roco-Bai all those years ago. They had to, because a couple days earlier was when she discovered that the Purple Bastard's army had suddenly materialized over C-53 and Fury didn't bother to tell her about it!

He must've seen it on her face and said, "look, if the delegation from Xandar hadn't been assassinated and you hadn't been taking on Veranke, I think I would've actually called you, and I had to make an educated guess!"

Carol sighed, she knew that was going to be used against her. Veranke was a Skrull who had been causing quite a few problems for her, as someone obsessed with the idea with Skrull purity, whatever that meant. She'd been engaging in very Kree-like tactics, if she was being honest with herself, and so she never felt all that good during all these fights. She was infuriating Talos and Soren and all the rest. Why would a Skrull openly side with Kree? Made no damn sense. She still hadn't been capture and her latest attack had threatened a major Xandarian outpost and of course the Purple Bastard had to plan the attack at the same time.

That it had been Frigga's son Loki who had been assigned command was the surprising part. Why would he willingly take orders from someone else, even someone as strong as the Purple Bastard? Fury knew who he was, of course, even if he was casting some doubt on the idea that it had been his army that was given to Loki, and that it was the artifact that created her that he had been after. Though by her suggestion, Frigga had finally convinced Fury to let her take the Tesseract back to
Asgard where it would be a lot safer.

The conversation had come up as to whether or not she’d want to introduce herself to the rest of them. The answer had been an immediate no. Thor was familiar with her, even if they hadn’t said much in the past decade or so to each other, past an awkward hello whenever she’d visited. She’d met Romanoff the one time when she was still a trainee and she seemed nice enough, but again, what use would there be if she could never be around for their disasters? Between herself and Monica and the Skrulls, there was no shortage of crap to be taken care of still.

"But...Avengers?"

"What’s wrong with it?"

"It just sounds silly."

"No it doesn’t. It’s inspiring. You don’t like it because I named them after you."

"Maybe. I just don’t know how to feel about it."

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2013

"I’m going to die this year."

That was a strange way for Frigga to begin the conversation, as strangely calm as ever as she was about everything. God, the years kept slipping by, even as Fury continued teasing her about it. She’d forget to visit Johann for a couple years and then she’d rush back and he’d be as nonplussed as ever. Not to mention the confusion that had sprouted when in all the commotion, Monica had finally noticed that for whatever reason, neither her nor her mother were seeming to age at all, and Carol wasn’t really aging either, and by now, that should be something to cause some concern. These were all things that had to be figured out and now Frigga of all people is saying calm as a cucumber that she’s going to die?

"Not just die, assassinated."

Fury just put his head in his hands. Everyone had been brought together for this one. Carol, the Rambeaus, the Skrulls, everyone. For once, everyone was completely and totally silent and said nothing. It was so unlike them.

"And we’re supposed to feel...good about this?" Maria broke the silence, her head in the crook of Carol’s shoulder, looking very numb.

"No, not especially," Frigga said, "and I’m very flattered that you’d greet my death with a lack of enthusiasm."

"Well, you sound very certain."

"I know the exact minute of the exact day in which it’s going to happen. I can’t say more for fear of interfering, but it won’t be for another few months. I’ll contact you again that day with enough time to spare for each of you, to give you each a proper goodbye and to tell you how much you mean to me."

"You still haven’t told your family about us, huh?” Fury said with a wry smile.
"You're my little secret," Frigga said, smiling in return.

Dearest Yesereth. How you've grown over all this time into such a confident young woman. You have always communicated the way you needed to communicate, been who you needed to be, walked according to your own path. You have given your all into helping the people of Hala find their place in the universe, you have studied immensely in the Asgardian libraries, and that mind of yours will one day be the only source of our knowledge. You have truly been a pleasure to behold.

My Soren, oh my Soren. Always there with a wry joke at someone else's expense (usually your husband!) Always with a kind word when needed, or the butt of a blaster pistol if need be. You are powerful as you are gentle, as kind as you are vicious. You should be so proud of who you are, proud to have a family like yours, proud to be the strongest of them in so many ways. You have contributed greatly to this galaxy and you should just be proud of yourself. I will miss you so much.

Talos, the warrior without a home for so long. Without a family, without friends, without anything. The rest have not seen the angry youngling you once were, so bitter and ferocious at a war that had taken its toll on your people over generations. You helped break that curse, you have helped bring the Skrulls to new heights, to let go of those old pains, to start anew. Our people will have to go through the same soon enough, and I hope you can be there for them the way we should have for you.

Nicholas Fury, always anticipating the next threat. You will never stop anticipating. You will never allow yourself to enjoy the moment very often. You are so much like Talos in that way, always on your lonesome, able to be in solitude for years at a time if need be. I am glad to see that you have begun to change your ways, even if you keep that softer side of yourself mainly to yourself and a select few. I am deeply honored that I got to be one of those few. Hard years are ahead, prepare for them.

What a wonderful woman you have become, Monica. You do not realize how deeply proud of you your two mothers are, and how proud I am of you. You shine like the night sky wherever you go, yet you'll always be too humble to ever view yourself as Monica Rambeau when the rest of the galaxy sees you as Photon. You have always feared that you will always play second fiddle to your Auntie Carol, but you are both two equally stunning instruments in the cosmic orchestra.

Maria, I know you worry often that you will not be able to protect your daughter and your lover when you will need to the most. You worry that for all their strength, when they fail, it will be because of you. You have always given everything of yourself to others, you have sacrificed everything in order to do a little good in a universe that can feel cold and unfeeling. Your strength is your greatest asset, your resilience your greatest gift. You see yourself only as mortal, but you have done more than gods.

Carol, my lovely Carol. I say goodbye to you last. What a difficult and lonely life you have led. You have held the lid of reality in your hand and resisted the urge. You recognize that there is no such thing as one great person who decides fate, but rather the multitudes who
choose it together. Your greatest gift will be to continue awakening others to the power inside them. You must not use your power to decide for them, but rather to unlock what is there in everyone.

I feel as though I must leave you with one parting question: Maria is the love of your life, is she not? Why don't you do something more about that?

To everyone, I love you all. You have made the final fraction of a fraction of my life that much sweeter. You have brought me so much joy. I am sorry that I cannot go on with you, but I will go to whatever is next knowing my love for you will fuel the way.

It had been the first time in years that all of them had been in the same place, and they spent the day in silence, dreading the moment they knew they were going to hear about it, and it was Fury who ended up getting the call. Carol softly got up and left the room impulsively, and walked over to the nearest wall that she knew wasn't crafted out of that damn metal alloy, a steel alloy by itself if she could tell. She placed her hand against it and used the photon energy to warm it up until a melted piece came off and left her glove sizzling. Using the liquid metal, she began to shape it, not really thinking, just having to do something she did years earlier so that Frigga's final question to her wouldn't go entirely to waste.

She entered the room again, blowing on her cupped hands to cool it. The thing looked incredibly rough and it was an estimate, but it was the thought that counted, that's what she was hoping. Hopefully it wasn't too small. That would absolutely devastate her.

She sat down next to Maria, who stared off into nowhere, tears silently going down her face and seeming to zone out a bit. She kept blowing on her hands, to the point where she began to draw attention to herself, everyone else staring in their mix of grief and confusion at her. She reached out a finger and touched what was in her hand and it had cooled, and she really didn't have the slightest idea of how to do this but it was now or never.

Carol reached out, blushing profusely, grabbing Maria's hand and slipping what she had created onto her middle finger. Maria stared blankly at it for a few seconds, Talos and Soren's hands going to their mouths as one, and then Maria burst out laughing.

"Over twenty goddamn years and you put it on the wrong finger?" Maria yelled out as loud as she could, getting Monica and Yesereth's attention from where they were silently mindmelding, and for the scariest of seconds Carol thought she had done it wrong and it was all ruined, and then suddenly Maria threw her arms around her and yelled at the top of her lungs, "you are so goddamn stupid!"

There they remained, Maria just whispering the word "stupid" over and over again, but holding onto Carol very tightly so that she could see, in her own way, that she meant this with as much love and affection as possible, and that she'd dreamed of this since she was a small child.

---------------------------------------------

2015

"Sokovia?"

"Sokovia."

"Fuck."
"Fuck."

They were in the New York branch again, but the entire thing had clearly been abandoned for quite some time, possibly over a year. There was no more SHIELD. It had been HYDRA the whole time. Pierce had been up to no good. Then some android made by Stark destroyed an entire country at once, albeit one that was basically the size of Rhode Island but that still left a mark. A whole country, gone. The majority of its population, dead.

"I'm not good at this, Carol."

"Well, if not for you, more than a majority would be dead."

No SHIELD. No Sokovia. Jesus Christ.

Fury just slumped up against the wall, looking older and more exhausted than ever. Goose was in his arms. There was nothing she could say or do that would comfort him, but she slumped down next to him and took his hand, not knowing what else to do, and he squeezed it as hard as he could as he silently shook.

She wouldn't see Fury again for eight years.

==========================================================================

2018

As soon as they had returned, she had decided to fly to Atlanta.

She figured the building containing that SHIELD branch was still there, and it had been Fury's primary residence. It had been where they had gotten takeout that one time, where they had met Una, a lot of good memories there, and Carol wanted to torture herself as much as possible because she'd fucked it all up again.

The only comfort she had gotten was choking that Purple Bastard and feeling his clear pain at her grip even before Thor sliced his head clean off, because there wasn't much more that could be done. She had actually walked off the Benatar and immediately flown off, not even bothering to say anything to anyone else, just needing to get as far away from it all as possible, and maximum hurt would be in the Atlanta branch. Maria and Monica were still on Hala and as soon as she had calmed down, she'd have to do what she'd been dreading for the past month and finally call them and tell them what happened. She suspected they already knew since it was the first time in decades she had ever not been by their side longer than a couple days with no communication.

She touched down near the entrance and had to wrench it open, and navigated by memory till she reached Fury's old office. She knew Goose was probably still there, that she'd probably taken to sneaking out and eating mice or something to keep up appearances.

She was right, Goose was there, and she saw the office, and the spread of papers, the last thing he'd been doing before he and Maria Hill and whatever was left of his little agency had gone off on some sort of business and then melted on the spot. She had both beepers, both of theirs, the ones they'd shared for twenty-three whole years, and they were both attached to her belt.

Carol clicked one on and then the other a few times. Goose just meowed at her, and she'd gotten good enough at reading Goose by now to know exactly what Goose was asking, and Goose was smart enough to be able to get the answer from her empty glance.

Carol spun around and hit the wall as hard as she could. She hit it right where she'd hit it nearly
two decades earlier, in the same place, and she'd gotten considerably more skilled and this time the photon energy was like a puncture and it bent the wall in. Adamantium was no longer enough to stop her. She hit it again and again and again and again, yelling louder with each impact, imagining the Purple Bastard's face each time. It had been the only time in her life she had truly wanted to hurt another living being and never stop hurting it, and she punched dents into the wall for quite a while.

One of the beepers went off. The one that had belonged to Fury. She looked at it curiously, and in LCD font it read:

*Throwing a party. Please feel free to join. We'd love to have you.*

*Love, Natasha*

Chapter End Notes

Maybe I might be hinting at a couple of the future lil yarns I've got in mind, but I'm doing that anyway! I initially thought of making it a separate series, but I wasn't sure if it would automatically redirect there or not, so I decided against it since I'm still kinda new to this site.

Comments, suggestions, improvements as always! This is going to be three sections, separated by three timelines, and then you're gonna see what I've got planned for the *true* ending!

- G
Epilogue, Part 2: 2018-2023

Chapter Summary

There was a lot of rebuilding to be done after the Mad Titan committed the largest mass genocide in all of record history. 4 billion dead on just C-53 alone. The Spiral Arms of the Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies were devastated by the carnage, and those five years had to be spent picking everything and everyone up.

But our story does not end there...but it's going to end somewhere.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There were two times between the years 2018 and 2023 that the various metahumans across the spiral arms of the Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies (using the Terran terminology, for emphasis) had a formal meeting with one another.

The first was within a few weeks of the event referred to colloquially by the media of C-53 as "The Blip," where the last remaining Titan used a modified device using technology created by the Xorrians and the Kree to supposedly wipe out half of all life in the entire universe.

It had quickly been discovered that this had been a major exaggeration, even three weeks later when the Asgardian known as Thor killed Thanos on an abandoned farming planet. Carol Danvers, who had not been publicly seen on her home planet since 1995, had been one of the few with the capabilities to be able to survey the extent of the damage. She and two other Terrans who had been presumed dead for many years, a mother and daughter duo called Maria and Monica Rambeau, along with several scouting parties of the shapeshifting species called the Skrulls, began to sweep across the boundaries of explored space between the two spiral arms of the two galaxies, and after several more weeks had determined that the effects had only been across a microscopic portion of both spiral arms and not the entire universe consisting of untold stars and planets. They had reached planets lightyears inside both where nothing had happened and no one had ever heard of or encountered them before. It was still described as if it was the entire universe, because Terrans have always held that bad habit of making everything about themselves, and quadrillions had died, but it certainly had not been all of creation.

The first Meta-Meeting (as Monica Rambeau, self-described as the cosmic superhero called Photon, nicknamed it), took place very shortly after Carol Danvers returned alone without the Rambeaus and without the Skrull family she had been closest to, consisting of Talos, Soren and Yesereth. They continued to try and mitigate the power struggles that had broken out across several planets as Carol decided to head back to C-53 to try and commiserate with her fellow Terrans.

Out of the entire gang, the informal group that had killed the Supreme Intelligence of the Kree and saved countless trillions of lives in their various misadventures, only the member who had remained planetside, one Nicholas Fury, had died.

Whoever was left had all met at Anthony Stark’s New Avengers Facility in upstate New York, and it had been a rather muted affair because there wasn't a lot to celebrate. As far as Carol Danvers was concerned, she'd only ever met one of them in person once before, and that had been very
briefly almost two decades earlier. Natasha Romanoff, only a trainee then but now one of the world's most prominent whistleblowers and combat specialists, had largely self-appointed herself as the closest thing to a "leader" as this loosely assembled group had to offer to the world as riots and conflicts overtook the planet, too much for anyone to take on at once. Carol hadn't even been back long enough to personally deal with any of it.

Romanoff had been a teenager, but now she was around the same age that Carol seemed to be slowly staying at for the past several years, and the bubbly enthusiasm and the Russian accent had completely vanished. She had been fully Americanized and it seemed to have made her almost as miserable as the Blip itself had. Carol was afforded a certain level of respect but also emotional distance by everyone else because she had both been able to physically restrain Thanos on her own and because it had come out in the couple months or so since that she'd been Nick Fury's closest friend. The idea of Fury having a genuine confidant was completely unheard of and how this somewhat cold and aloof woman avoiding everyone else had been ludicrous to them.

A lot of the group had never met before, and there was awkward small talk and mingling that Carol pointedly avoided, she was simply too nervous to try and talk to any of them. It wasn't really fear that they would dislike her, but more that she really was in no mood for small talk, and none of them seemed particularly close to Fury. Gradually it spread throughout the room who that woman was in the corner of the room, now that the info surrounding her had been declassified.

She had known some of them, the ones calling themselves the Avengers (why the hell did they have the same name as her callsign while she had worked at Pegasus? Fury's work, probably), only for a few hours when she had gotten a page on her beeper right as people around her on a planet she was working to de-escalate a conflict on suddenly began to turn into dust all around her. She had rushed to defuse the situation, which became a lot easier now that most of the population had died, and flown as fast as she could using jump points back to C-53, broke into the very building she was now attending a party at, and confronted Romanoff about it.

Then within a twenty-four hour period, she'd tracked the ones called Stark and Nebula to Titan, piloted one of their Quinjets to Thanos' location, had Thor kill the bastard, and now, back home, had almost no time at all to process other than screaming and tearing up the walls in Fury's old Atlanta branch of SHIELD until Romanoff had inexplicably invited her to this event via her old beeper.

So it was Romanoff who first approached her, kind of answering the silent question everyone else had had about her, which had largely been why she'd been avoiding these bastards ever since Fury had told her a decade ago that he was trying to enforce the planet's safety by assembling what he called "metahumans" together. Romanoff had no powers, neither did that brooding middle-aged man called Barton, who she recognized as an old employee of Fury's.

"You're not a talker." Romanoff said, standing next to her, arms folded. "The boys are nervous about that."

"Why is the billionaire nervous?" Carol said, nodding in Stark's direction. He'd probably said one sentence to her since they had landed, something along the lines of her being "new blood" and therefore the only one who was capable of getting anything done. Stark confused her because he wasn't the cocky douchebag she'd seen on the television in her attempts to convince Fury not to trust him with anything. Now he was just a broken old man who sat with his redheaded wife at one of the tables quietly talking to Steve Goddamn Rogers of all people, who even after a decade she couldn't believe was actually alive somehow. Good shape for an old guy, but broken.

"The billionaire is nervous because he doesn't like change, and he's not used to you."
"Hmm," Carol said. She had spent the first hour or so of the event mentally cataloguing people in her head, and even as she quietly answered Romanoff’s questions and attempts to connect, she began to evaluate all of them in her head, trying to figure out if any of them would be useful for the massive rebuilding effort that nobody was prepared for.

Anthony Stark

A bit biased against him because his dad stole vibranium from Wakanda way back, and the apple never fell far from the tree. Was an arms dealer for a while, sold weapons to terrorists without realizing, who were in turn sponsored by his company. Apparently killed his own CEO and took charge before handing the whole thing over to his secretary, who is also his wife.

Immensely strong inside that suit of his, practically useless without it. He's still a spoiled rich boy at heart, immensely manipulative and controlling, though that's not to say he's heartless. Had a soft spot for this kid from New York who he took in as his ward or something like that, and the kid died right in front of him and he's been really broken up by that. It has not helped matters that several of the others have very publicly insulted him to his face about how goddamn irresponsible and stupid it was to bring a child to fight Thanos. Then again, I've done the same thing with Monica, so I can't judge that much. Stark is my worst nightmares come to life. He's what I would be if something had ever happened to Monica at the same age.

Virginia Potts

Stark's wife and the CEO of Stark Industries. She's pregnant with his child, they just announced it an hour ago. They were, I imagine, immensely pleased to see each other after weeks of isolation. It might also be a way to compensate for the fact that Stark saw that kid, Peter Parker, as a surrogate child or something? She hasn't said much to me either. I don't know if it's because she worries that I'm somehow Stark's replacement or something. I don't think I am. She's been avoiding a lot of the others, she seems really pissed at them, everyone's egos are getting in the way.

Normally I wouldn't advocate repressing emotions but a lot of people are in danger and I'm one of the few actively doing anything about it. She has an excuse, she doesn't have powers. She's at least been starting up a lot of charitable efforts and trying to hire people to repair a lot of damages and provide resources to people. What concerns me about her is that she's apparently used the company to gobble up and absorb a lot of others. I was looking it up, Hammer, Advanced Idea Mechanics, and now Rand after this other billionaire died have all been absorbed into the fold.

Steven Rogers

We interacted only briefly during the mission to Thanos' planet. Acts exactly like he did in the old serials my dad was obsessed with. Very much a "how do you do, ma'am" kinda guy, but also the only other one here that doesn't seem nervous around me. I think it's because he's so old that he sees me as a kid, since I'm technically older than everyone else here. He's kept to himself since the mission, I think he and I have been coping the same way. I'm not really sure what to say to him because all my memories of him are associated with that fucking prick Joseph Danvers. "Hey, my abusive father loved you." Not a good conversation starter. I don't know how he's exactly like he was in those old movies, just this really square and polite buff guy with the mentality of an old man.

Thor Odinsson

He's really taken it worse than anyone else. He blames himself, when I'd actually blame the one Stark and Nebula referred to as "Peter Quill," who discovered that Purple Bastard had killed his own daughter and his lover and sabotaged the chance to kill him. Quill is dead too, though he apparently helped kill that slimy worm Ronan and a Celestial called Ego, so I guess he wasn't
entirely useless. Anyway, Thor recognized me immediately, I guess I really made an impression on him back then. I've seen him crying in the base a few times, he's been off on his own too. I've tried to talk to him about it but he's almost always drunk or on some kind of Terran drug and telling me to fuck off and I figure there's not much I can do. I've been in similarly bleak positions. Quite a few rooms in the facility have been destroyed by him during drunken rages. He needs a goddamn therapist. Potts is apparently hiring someone though.

Bruce Banner

Got probably the warmest overall greeting from him after returning. He's the guy Fury spent so many years chasing after back during that second time skip of mine (Jesus, that was so long ago!) I've gotten to see both Banner and the Hulk by now, and he's working with the therapist Potts hired, Skivorski I think, to get those two sides under control. Banner, despite his reputation, is actually just an overall really warm and friendly person, and I've actually really enjoyed talking with Hulk. I know I shouldn't think of them as different, but I can't help it, and Hulk is also the only one that can properly calm Thor down. Hulk is easily angered but I don't think he's triggered by it like a lot of people think, because he's quite calm and personable at times. Mentality of a small child, he really likes playing with Legos and I've helped him build a couple things with them, using my photon energy to coordinate his big hands.

Natasha Romanoff

No powers, but the only one of them who seems to have been able to keep her head out of her ass. She's been using modified Iron Man suits lately, a lot of modified tech from previous foes of theirs or whoever, to try and pacify people. The real danger is the extremist groups that are calling Thanos the second coming of Christ or whoever, which is ridiculous. She's been trying harder than anyone else to befriend me, I think because she's the only one of them around during Fury's early days as Director. She's nice enough, I just feel uncomfortable by people who want to be my friend. I think she gets that, though. She just looks like she needs a hug after everything she's been through. She and Banner had a flirtation, but the two are so uncomfortable about it that they avoid each other.

Clint Barton

He's a bastard. His family got iced by Purple Bastard and I'd feel bad for him if he hasn't been trying to compensate for it by picking fights with literally everyone else. Romanoff is always defending him, I have no idea why. Unlike Thor, he badly wants to cry but won't let himself, so he just gets aggressive. He's mad at me because he tried hitting on someone called Okoye and she whooped his ass good and I burst out laughing and let her do it. He's either trying to fuck it or fight it as far as other Terrans go. Actually, I've noticed that Okoye, Rocket and Nebula are the three I like most and those are the three that have beaten the shit out of him. He's just got such a punchable face, even though I've never hit him. I might change that. I don't know why they tolerate him. Also, he's been trying to bully Banner because I think he's sweet on Romanoff too and Banner just doesn't take the bait. That's actually when Rocket bit him, because he was getting so fed up with what a child he is. I didn't get to see that one in person, though.

James Rhodes

He and Stark and Potts have been inseparable for the past few weeks. They're apparently very close, so I don't blame them. He's a nice enough guy, though a bit stiff and awkward. He's disabled from the waist down ever since some fight at an airport, and he's got these robot legs that do the work for him. We've spotted each other silently in the gym a couple times. We actually haven't said much of anything to each other, but he's respectful and quiet and I like people like that a lot.
might actually be willing to be his friend.

**Okoye**

She's been appointed the Wakandan ambassador to the United Nations in recent weeks and has served as a liaison. T'Chaka's children both died in the Blip so their mother Ramonda has been appointed the ruler of the country. Okoye and I have gotten along the best out of all of them, at least because she's not a proper Avenger. She's a really warm and kind person, and I think she's noticed how nervous I've been around everyone so she's been trying her best to make me feel welcome whenever she's around. We've talked a bit about my experiences meeting T'Chaka, and we've planned for me to visit Wakanda again at some point so she can show me around. Very dry sense of humor too, another really good quality to have.

**Rocket Raccoon**

Considering how rough around the edges he can be, I was fully expecting us not to get along. For whatever reason, he's actually been really nice to me as well, though I suspect part of that is how much we both absolutely have grown to dislike Barton. Still a sardonic bastard who will constantly throw insults my way, but they're playful and we both have sort of the same emotional walls up. Hell of a card player, I'll give him that much. Drinks like a sailor and maybe enables Thor unintentionally way too often. Really broken up by the loss of the team he belonged to, especially this living tree he keeps referring to. Aside from Quill, they sounded like a nice bunch.

**Nebula**

One of the Purple Bastard's "adopted" children. Abused from a very young age, more robot than person now, and at first she was just as aggressive and rude to me as she was with everyone else. Over the last few weeks, she's softened up a bit, especially when learning my hand in killing the Purple Bastard. She's still not very nice, but it's an emotional wall I recognize. I can tell the difference between a sadist and a traumatized person trying to protect themselves. She's nervous as hell around me still. Rocket had confided in me that she's really depressed and that she needs to see a therapist too. But all of us do, really.

Those were the ones she had already met before today. She had only really interacted with Barton whenever he was getting into a petty conflict with the less patient members of the team and Thor during one of his meltdowns, but the rest were wandering about, doing whatever they were doing. She hadn't seen them frequently, she'd been called in to defuse situations and now might as well be the time to publicly reveal herself after all this hiding. There wasn't really any media anymore so she spread via word-of-mouth and the connection was made that she would keep randomly appearing in 1995 and 2002. Yes, the New Orleans thing had been her, and so on. If there was some rightwing militia picking a fight, she'd appear and scare them off. Religious nutjobs protesting at an abortion clinic? She'd follow them back to their churches and blow up the buildings (while they were empty). Carol simply did not have the time to be all that diplomatic for all their petty concerns. And this was just America. The remaining Avengers had to be everywhere to try and restore peace any way they could, and as much as Stark and a few of the others protested, Carol simply did not have time for capitulation.

She'd mostly done all this alone, none of them could afford to go together. It was strange, of course, for people to see a walking raccoon shooting up a white nationalist convention. They had all gotten so bold thinking now was the time they could kill whatever group of people they'd long wanted to kill, and were quite surprised when people like Carol simply appeared and scared them off. As much as they all tried to make themselves out to be the victims, the rest of the world no longer had any patience for such petty concerns.
Thanos, ironically, made people even more bigoted after the fact.

Point being, they were all together now, in this futile attempt to try and bridge the gap between the registered ones and the random ones who had been screwing around in their own parts of the world. Most of the newcomers had no outfits or tech and were just ordinary people with powers who had never caught anyone else's attention before.

Two of them introduced themselves as Foggy Nelson and Matthew Murdock, who had been hired on by Potts to address all of the legal parts of metahuman work after the Blip, and only because Murdock himself had powers and they wanted to keep track of him too. He'd been spending a long time trying to keep track of this crime boss guy called Fisk, but he'd died in the Blip so he had nowhere else to go.

There was a black-haired woman in leather named Jessica who had started drunkenly hitting on her the second she entered the room, and Carol had very awkwardly rebuffed her advances. She had super strength or something like that, worked as a private investigator and had also been hired by Romanoff for covert activities of some kind, presumably detective-y stuff. Honestly, she just thought that Romanoff and Potts just really wanted to keep track of everyone and using the funds from the latest corporation they'd scooped up would do the trick. Jessica was certainly attractive, and Maria and her had neither forbid the other from taking other lovers but also not bothering to try, and Carol was uncomfortable enough with intimacy not to go for it. Flattering as it was, she only felt comfortable with Maria.

Another super-strong guy, really buff, calling himself Luke, tried hitting on her too. It was funny how the response of a lot of these people was to get drunk and then try to screw, and Carol had never been hit on this much by everyone else. This did stop once the room collectively learned a bit at a time who she was and then most people were too afraid to talk to her. Romanoff found the entire thing kind of amusing since everyone else was already too famous for most people to feel brave enough making a pass at them. Later during the night, he got brave enough to talk to her again and drunkenly confessed to her that he'd been really torn up about his billionaire friend Danny dying during the Blip, and Carol had no earthly idea how to react to that. This is when Murdock appeared and thanked Carol for not being rude, for Luke was already dating someone and this is not how he was going to ruin that relationship. Maria would almost piss herself laughing later on as Carol told her this particular anecdote.

The one that Carol got along with the most out of the newcomers was a friend of Thor's who called herself Valkyrie, some kind of Asgardian warrior type. She was flirtatious but not aggressively so, and so after a while she and Carol and Romanoff got to chatting and Carol found herself liking her quite a bit. Eventually she went off and she was found later on at a table with Thor fast asleep leaning on her shoulder while she was talking to Banner, and she saw Carol and winked and they both laughed at the absurdity of it all. She had brought along a strange friend of hers, a blue rocky man calling himself Korg, and he was initially disappointed that Carol did not want to play some strange Terran game with a misspelled name with him, but he was also completely nonplussed with who she was.

"Aw yeah, I heard of ya, mate," Korg said once Valkyrie had sidled up again and told him, "Yeah, you were the one that killed that Supreme Intelligence, so I heard. Real lovely job, that, real big fan of your work." He had clapped her on the back so hard that she had almost fallen over laughing, and perhaps it had been Korg that got everyone else to see that she wasn't as emotionless as originally perceived just because he was so goddamn hysterical to be around.

"Yeah, I have a friend, his name is Miek, and he's taken to pretending I've killed him for a laugh. It works so often, mate." And then Carol would be doubled over laughing until she was in tears yet
again, and Korg just took it in stride. She would often visit him and Miek in New Asgard (in a Terran country called Norway) for the next few years even though Thor would avoid her.

Of course, as these things went and everyone consumed more and more liquor, things began to get tense. These metahumans types were really repressed and so this means they all began to butt heads sooner or later. Carol had, in retrospect, made the right choice in hanging back and avoiding almost everyone else. Not everyone got in petty spats about things, mind you. Rogers remained as impassive and friendly as ever, nothing seemed to phase him, and it seemed to be him and Romanoff having to de-escalate various conflicts. Eventually it got so bad that they both began throwing Carol desperate looks and so Barton would almost come to blows with Jessica after he tried to drunkenly slap her on the ass and suddenly he was restrained by a burst of photon energy, bending his arms so far backwards that he apparently had severe sprains in his muscles for weeks afterwards. Then he burst into tears in front of everyone and Romanoff put an arm around his shoulder and led him off out of the room.

Korg did not help matters by calling him a "fucking cocksucker," a new Terran expression he’d recently learned, with the most friendly voice possible, causing Carol and Rocket and Valkyrie to try and fail to not lose their collective shit, causing Barton to try and get out of Romanoff’s clutches and charge them, only to have his nose broken by Jessica. The whole room got quiet then as he was dragged off, screaming curses in every direction. Carol and Valkyrie still looked at each other and smirked briefly, though.

The Avengers table, as in the one with Stark/Potts/Rhodes/Rogers/Banner/Okoye, just stopped talking almost immediately after that as everyone began to separate into their little sections and largely stop mingling as much. Rocket/Nebula/Korg/Valkyrie/Thor made up another table and Murdock/Nelson/Jones/Cage made up the last. There was tons of other people there, there was Stark employees and defense contractors and politicians or anyone else who wanted to talk to what was left of the Avengers. There was a group of kids calling themselves the Runaways who had all kept to themselves, along with these two teenagers called Tyrone and Tandy who had not left each other's side since getting there, and those two groups had talked exclusively among themselves, all awkwardly throwing admiring glances in the direction of the Avengers table. Some had brought their partners with them and some had arrived late. A few friends of the "Defenders table," as it was called, called Karen Page and Claire Temple and Misty Knight, had all showed up and sat down with them, and then some mustachioed old man calling himself Ross had sat down with Stark, and the two began to argue about something, and then Banner suddenly began to expand and turn into the Hulk and Ross screamed like a child and fell on his ass, causing the entire room to burst into laughter, minus Carol herself.

Which left Carol on her own again. She'd see Maria and Monica and the Skrulls again soon. Fury still burned her up inside, the last thing he ever did was try and call her. She wasn't drinking at all. For some reason, the only food served there was a giant chunk of meat that Stark referred to as "shawarma," and it was pretty damn good but she wished there was more options. It was a symbolic thing to these Avengers, they'd apparently eaten it together after their first big fight against what had only been a small portion of Purple Bastard's forces, and her own encounters with them hadn't been fun.

She heard some stomping noises and turned to see the Hulk sitting down on the floor next to the table where she sat alone, though Valkyrie had waved her over a few times and she'd smiled and shook her head. She had said with her lips, "later," and turned back to try and comfort Thor a little bit. But Hulk just scooched on his ass over to her, rippling and bending the steel floor, which caused her to smile at him a little and pat the ground right next to her.

"Hello, Glowy."
"Hello, Hulk."

"Glowy no talk?"

"Not right now, Hulk."

"OK."

Silence for a little while as Hulk pulled up an entire slab of shawarma and ate it all by himself.

"What happens if you eat that much and turn back to Banner?"

Hulk smiled with an evil grin and said, "Then Banner gotta poop a lot."

Carol spit out the water she was drinking and slammed a fist onto the table as she convulsed with laughter. "Hulk, that's mean!"

"So what? It for Banner."

"Why do you not like Banner?"

"Banner small and puny. You small but not puny. I see Glowy fly and fight with glows, you strong and small."

"Thank you, Hulk."

"You welcome, Glowy. Hulk like you."

"I like you too, Hulk."

"You Hulk's friend?"

"I am if you want me to be."

"OK, you Hulk's friend then," said Hulk with a big goofy smile on his face. "Rest of them no like Hulk."

"Valkyrie and Thor like you."

"Well, maybe them too," Hulk said, "Tin Man no like me. Tin Man fight me in Africa once."

"Why was that?"

"Hulk got bad mind from Weird Dead Lady. Tin Man fight Hulk instead of talk it out. Hulk no like Tin Man. But Tin Man let Hulk smash sometimes so Hulk made do."

"What about Captain America?"

"Who that?"

"Steve?"

"Oh, Blue Boy. He OK. Rhodey OK. Natty..." Hulk stopped and looked down and his cheeks got a darker shade of green than before, and Carol smiled and patted him on his elbow, which was as high as she could reach.

"Natty's pretty," Carol teased.
"Yes," said Hulk, "she pretty. She like Bow Boy. Everyone so weird and fight over who they like. Not Hulk."

"Why not?"

"Hulk smash for good reason."

Carol patted him on the elbow again, ignoring the strange looks that everyone except Thor and Valkyrie were now throwing at the two of them, considering Hulk's general reputation in the world. Hulk very gingerly patted her shoulder with one finger in return.

"Hulk no wanna hurt Glowy."

"You're not hurting me."

"Good," Hulk said, and patted her again with the same finger. "What you think about Bow Boy?"

"Barton? He's an ass."

Hulk bellowed with laughter and slapped his knees with his hands, creating a kinetic wave that blew everything off of Carol's table and caused her hair to billow in the wind created by him. "Glowy smart! Glowy no like Bow Boy!"

"Glowy has dealt with his type before," Carol said. She could hear Rocket from a distance saying to Nebula, "how the hell is she the one who's able to talk to him?" She could hear Nebula say in return, "I dunno, maybe she's a Hulk whisperer."

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A bit later on now. Romanoff had sidled up next to a very sad looking Barton, who for his part kept giving Carol confused looks and drunkenly asking who she was, and then forgetting, and then saying it again. He and Romanoff kept giving each other very flirtatious looks and then the Hulk would look sadly at them and Carol had no idea how to process any of that. She had worried so long whether or not she had gotten Maria's affections that she never took stock of just how uncomplicated their relationship had been for all these years.

"You know, for a bunch of people mostly in middle age, they treat relationships like they're teenagers," Carol said out loud to herself, not really thinking very much. She'd had a few drinks by now. Not hitting nearly as hard as it was to most of the others, but she could feel it and she missed the Rambeaus and the Skrulls dearly. She would've given everything to be able to hold Maria or crack jokes with Monica or mind meld with Yesereth or have Talos play pranks on everyone or hear some of Soren's adventure stories.

"They used to believe that I was the immature one in this regard," a deep and very inebriated voice boomed, and she turned and saw that somehow Thor had been able to sneak up next to both of them.

"Hello, Point Break," Hulk said helpfully, and Thor tried very hard to glare at him but softened a little, and sighed and leaned up against what was supposed to be the Hulk's waist but ended up closer to his left (thankfully clothed) buttcheek.

"Hulk, did you know that me and Lady Carol Danvers--"

"Glowy?"
"Yes, Glowy," Thor said, and hiccuped, "Glowy and I have met before."

"How you meet Glowy?"

"Well," Thor said with a hiccup and a cough added for good measure, as Carol silently smiled to herself, "I may have sort of, um, made a pass at her when we first met."

Hulk's head slowly turned to look Thor dead in the face, eyes wide as dinner plates, and Carol wished she knew how to use one of those smartphones Stark had repeatedly offered to her to record that moment to play back for the rest of her life.

Hulk might be a simpleton, but he was no fool, and he burst into hysterical laughter, pounding the floor with his hands, creating craters in them and Stark and Potts winced from their place at the table every time, and Rogers did so as well in solidarity.

"You braver than Hulk thought! You lucky Glowy Lady no tear you into bits!"

"Yes he is, Hulk," Carol said, patting him on his giant hand with her own and getting him to smile a toothy grin back at her.

"Well," Thor said, looking thoroughly sheepish, "it was the only way I knew how to relate to most people then. They would be so impressed by my royal lineage that it...wouldn't be difficult."

"Hmmph," Carol said.

"You should have taken it as a compliment, mortal! You have seen my physique, have you not?"

"Sure," Carol said nonchalantly, "but I wouldn't demonstrate now because there are children here."

"Oh good Odin," Thor said, noticing the Runaways for the first time, "so there is! Sneaky little bastards!"

"You're in very good shape," Carol said, "but I am gay as the Fourth of July."

"What does the date on your Gregorian calendar have to do with your sexual preference?"

"It's an expression Maria uses."

"Who is this one called Maria?"

"My, um, girlfriend."

"Ah ha!" Thor laughed, slapping the floor with that new hammer of his, the much bigger one, leaving gouges and once again causing Stark and Potts to wince from their spot on cue. "You are romantically involved! I never could've imagined!"

"Why not?"

"Always so standoffish and closed off, never opening up," Thor hiccuped again, as if to explain his lack of filter.

"Not unless it's the right person."

"To use a Terran parlance, touche," Thor said with a dramatic flourish, then toppled over to the floor and Hulk had to pick him back up by accidentally giving him a wedgie. Thor spent several long moments rearranging his undergarments after that point.
"You know that I was romantically involved with someone, right?" Thor said.

"Valkyrie vaguely mentioned it."

"Yes, she was a brilliant scientist, and then I Thor-ed it up."

"What does that mean?"

"It is my family friendly way of saying an expletive I am fond of saying."

"Ah. You'd think with the physique you couldn't possibly find a way to hate yourself."

"Oh, foolish mortal," Thor said, drinking deeply from a flask the other two had only just noticed, the liquid coming out from it glowing a strange light blue color, "You know very little about sentient life. To be sentient is to hate yourself."

"What that mean?" Hulk asked innocently.

"Hulk, sweetie," Carol said, patting his hand again, "you don't want to know."

"Okay," Hulk said cheerfully, then patted her on the top of her head. It may have ruffled her hair, but Carol couldn't help but giggle anyway. Most of these clowns weren't too appealing to her, but she liked the Hulk very much, despite his reputation.

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The party was over, and everyone was very drunk, and people began to pair off if they were already going out or maybe not. Stark and Potts, Murdock and Page, Cage and Temple (and Knight!), and everyone else was either asleep at one of the tables or wandering off to find somewhere to go to sleep. Hulk was asleep in the field outside of the facility. Carol suspected that Jessica and Valkyrie might've gotten acquainted to each other because they'd both left at the same time. Rocket had wandered off back to that spaceship of his, god only knows where Nebula was, and the Runaways and Tyrone and Tandy were all excitedly arranging some of the remaining tables and tablecloths into some kind of makeshift fort. They had given Carol some weird looks and then they all seemed to defer to Tyrone and Tandy, the two oldest, who had begun demonstrating their powers. Tandy could create tangible light that could be made into weapons and Tyrone had been wearing this really huge cloak that he could teleport using, and hide things inside. He was seemingly a pocket dimension in human form and the kids would keep jumping in one side of the cloak and appearing on the other side, laughing hysterically.

She suspected, sadly, that Romanoff and Barton might be together behind everyone's backs. Banner would get a nasty shock from that one if he ever found out. But she just began to clean the room, making sure not to touch the chair-and-table-fort that the kids had all built, using the photon energy to move things along a lot faster.

"Mind if I join?"

She looked up from her place on the floor to see Steve Rogers standing in front of her, still the model of impassiveness and politeness. She nodded and he got down on his knees as well and began to pick up food and plastic plates and so on. When it had come time to dispose of everything, Hulk had gobbled it all down, burped so loud he shattered a window, and that's when he wandered outside and fell asleep on the lawn. They spent a few silent minutes cleaning up the mess, Carol just not saying much of anything because she felt at once much older and much younger than Rogers.
"How are you settling in?" Rogers finally broke the silence.

"I'm settling okay," Carol said without much inflection in her voice.

"It's a very chaotic bunch. Wasn't always so chaotic. Thanos has brought out the worst in them."

"I'm sure," Carol said, smiling a little, sweeping up a pile of crumpled napkins with the photon energy and throwing it in the trash.

"It's funny. When Loki destroyed New York, nothing like this. When Ultron dropped Sokovia from the sky like a meteor, nothing like this. Nothing broke them until this. I think it's because very few of us died before now. We'd only lost one of our number before."

"Pietro Maximoff," Carol said, having read all the files already and having heard about him firsthand from Fury.

"Yeah, only casualty. his sister Wanda is gone now too." Rogers continued to clean with her, and finally asked, "you knew about us the whole time and never made contact until now, why?"

Carol looked up. "Why what? Like I said, most planets don't have you. I've had to handle their messes."

"No no no, you misunderstand. I'm not blaming you, and I know there was a lot of people who needed your help. But at the very least, you could've said hello, made contact, made us aware of what was out there."

"It's not like I knew what Thanos was up to beforehand," Carol said. "And he moved quick, he went after planets that were vulnerable and couldn't easily alert any others before the Xorrian artifacts--"

"Infinity Stones."

"Sure, but that's who made them. He'd gotten the idea from the Kree, ironically enough."

"What you are."

"What I used to be. They tried to do with one what he tried to do with all of them. I should've known then."

"Miss Danvers--"

"Carol."

"Carol, I don't blame you for him. There's nothing you could've done. You saved my friend's life, I am in no way upset at you. All I'm asking is why you never made contact, in general. Why did you avoid us? It couldn't have been animosity towards this planet, you would visit Fury sometimes--"

"He never alerted me to anything that happened here till after the fact. He took all that responsibility on himself."

"Yes, but you could've still said hello, Carol."

"I don't understand."

"Carol, who do you work with?"
"The Rambeaus, the Skrulls."

"And you're...together with Maria."

"That's none of your business."

"No it's not," Rogers said, hanging his head and sighing with exhaustion. "It's neither here nor there. I'm not saying this to say you did anything wrong, but Fury sure as hell wasn't trying to hide you. I'm just saying that we would've all liked someone else around."

Carol sat down on the floor, watching the kids play and the two older teenagers almost babysitting them, and smiled a little. They kept on giving Rogers those admiring looks, similar to how Monica still looked at her sometimes.

Rogers saw them too and waved, and all of them squealed and rushed underneath the tablecloth laughing. They audibly heard, "holy shit, he waved at us!" from one of them and they both laughed.

"You ever get used to that?" Carol asked.

"Nope," Rogers said, "I'll never get used to it. What I was trying to say is that we would've all liked to be your friends earlier."

Carol laughed a little at that. "I uh, I've had kind of a different career than the rest of you."

"How so?"

"Well, I haven't spent very much time here. This is still kind of a novelty to you. Universe-ending threats are something I've gotten really used to and this is your first time with one. I don't say that to say that I'm better than you, I'm not. I would've gotten my ass handed to me if I had taken on Thanos alone. I did get my ass handed to me when I took him on alone."

"Wait, you've fought him before?"

"Once," Carol said, her face falling. "I did not fare well. I promised him the next time I saw him would be the day he died."

"You got your wish."

"Sure, but that's the worst way to get it."

Steve laughed, and they fell into silence for a few more moments before she spoke up again.

"But also I've dealt with types like him before, though admittedly not nearly as many have died before. But I'm used to planets being devastated, entire species and civilizations wiped out in an instance. It happens all the time, Mr. Rogers--"

"You will not," Rogers said with a smile, "refer to me like that."

"Fine, Steve, Captain America, whatever," Carol said, "The difference between me and all of you is that you got powers and you did the right thing, and I got powers and was a shithead for a while. I was one of the bad guys, I was killing off Skrulls--"

"I've read the file Fury wrote on you, Carol," Rogers said, "and you were brainwashed."

"Still did it," Carol said, "So I'm making up for the awful thing I've done, even if I didn't know
better. I don't mean to be self-deprecating, but the reason I never tried talking to any of you till I got the beeper was because I saw what you did and how people spoke of you, and I knew that my presence would complicate things. And now, here I am, after hearing about you for a decade from Fury crowing about you every chance he got."

"Did he really?"

"He was over the moon about you guys. Pleased as punch. He'd ring me when Stark killed his own CEO, or when you destroyed SHIELD, and I'd insist I could've showed up and fixed it, and I was being arrogant. He would talk so highly about all of you. Even Barton."

"Barton is," Rogers said with a worried look, "he's not taking it well. He wasn't like this before."

"Or maybe he was the whole time and it took this to make him stop bothering to play nice," Carol said.

"Fury did name the Avengers after you," Rogers said with a smile.

Carol smiled. "I bet you all wondered for years how it got such a corny name."

They sat a little while longer, the kids peering out of the tablecloth fort every so often to try and peek at them.

"What does everyone think about me? You physically can't lie, so you can say," Carol asked after a minute.

Rogers laughed and said, "That's not true. And most people aren't sure what to make of you. You were a rumor from the 1990s, and you'd randomly pop up in spectacular fashion. And suddenly, the person who Fury has spent years implying he knew personally is here, and she's saved Stark's life, and she's at the party avoiding everyone. Either she's arrogant and thinks she's too good for us, or she's a deeply anxious person trying to hide it, and would rather appear rude than admit she's afraid to talk to people."

"Ouch," Carol said.

"We're all anxiety ridden," Rogers said, "I sure as hell am. We're a bundle of mental illnesses around here. I'm sure we've all got major PTSD of some kind and we've spent ten years not treating it. Stark still wakes up screaming at night and not a day goes by where I'm not back at the damned POW camp looking right into that bastard Schmidt's eyes."

"Never too late to start," Carol said, shifting uncomfortably, always so close to forgetting that the quite docile Johann she knew had been a vicious son of a bitch and the immense amounts of work it had taken him to try and do better.

"Stark in particular is torn up because he watched that kid Parker die right in front of him. Saw the kid as a surrogate son. I'm sure you've heard about him by now. Barton has tried to get a rise out of him by taunting him about it."

"Ass," said Carol.

"Parker was a really earnest youngster," Rogers said, causing Carol to snort at the use of the word "youngster" without irony, "good head on his shoulders, working class kid from Queens who got the opportunity of a lifetime. Complete opposite of Stark, born with a silver spoon in his mouth and had everything handed to him."
"You knew his dad," Carol said.

"Casually," Rogers said, "Nice enough to me. Not so nice to others, I've heard."

"My dad was a big fan of yours," Carol said, "and he'd be real pissed I got to meet you before he got to."

"Not a nice guy either, huh?"

"Nope," Carol said, "but that's nothing compared to the quadrillions dead."

"It's gonna get a lot worse," Rogers said, "They're carting off a lot of metahumans to the Raft. A lot of them are people that fought the people in this room and they're all going to be locked in together. I'm against it, but we just don't have time to deal with the situation that's brewing over there. Stark's just eager to get them as far away from people as possible, but I suspect quite a few are just troubled people that could use a second chance being lumped in with the genuinely sadistic ones."

"I'm not one of them, am I?"

"Stark backed you up to Ross, plus I don't think he could contain you if he tried," Rogers said.

"Stark backed me up?"

"Either they agree to comply with Ross or they go to the lowest quarters of the Raft. Stark wants to use them to pacify things. I don't know what the best option is with that. There's a lot of fires to put out. He'd used them once to contain several of our teammates and now every single one of them is dead, every person who could've talked back, no more. Stark ironically got quite a bit of luck from Thanos."

"I'll help however much I can," Carol said.

"I know," Rogers said, "but either way, hardly fair to have you clean up the place by yourself."

"After that," Carol said, "you need to properly introduce yourself to those kids."

"Do I have to?"

"Yes, Mr. Rogers," Carol said with a laugh, "do your duty."

They cleaned a while longer, the Runaways and Tyrone and Tandy still peeking out at them, and Carol said right before they finished, "I feel like we've met before somewhere."

Rogers said, "Why do you think that?"

Carol said, "I dunno. Might be the movies."

Rogers smiled and embraced her abruptly, and Carol could feel him struggling very hard not to cry in that moment, and she very awkwardly reciprocated and they held each other for several seconds. Wasn't that kind of hug, thank God, but she still didn't know what else to do.

"I need a therapist," Rogers said, and broke the embrace, warm smile back on his face as he wandered over to them and they all rushed out to meet him, surrounding him. Carol stared after him curiously.

"Who's that?" She heard Tandy asking him.
"That," Rogers said, with a wave at Carol, "is Captain Marvel. You ever hear of the Kree invasion of 1995? She's the one who stopped it."

They all said "whoa" as one and gave her similarly admiring looks, and Carol waved awkwardly at them as she left the room to call Maria and tell her all about what happened.

She heard one of them ask "so did the Super-Soldier Serum work everywhere?" and heard a loud slapping noise and a yell and she smiled a little bit, wandering away.

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2023

The second of the two meetings took place a couple days after the deaths of both Stark and Thanos, after the funeral, where Carol and Fury had to act very casually around each other for a while as if they weren't just dying to grab each other and cry for a while, processing just how long it had been since they had seen each other. Fury was in Professional Mode and so was Carol. This time, Maria and Monica and the Skrulls had come along. They hadn't gone to the funeral, since the guest list for that was small, but now here they were at the big celebration.

Carol's own participation in that final fight had been comparatively small. They'd been defusing a conflict on Centauri-IV as a wave of Kree remnants had taken the opportunity to try and restart the assimilation with them, and Carol had gotten the beeper from Rogers along with the message that all the dead had suddenly returned, and as legions of Centaurians suddenly appeared out of nowhere, outnumbering the Kree significantly, Maria and Monica stayed behind to defuse things there as Carol had rushed off back to C-53. Outnumbered, the Kree were still dangerous and they had no time.

In a rush, Carol had mouth pressed Maria deeply and hugged Monica and hoped to whatever god was out there that Purple Bastard wouldn't kill her or win again, and then taken as many jump points as possible to get there. She had arrived in time to go full "binary state" and take out Thanos' largest ship, and she could faintly see Rocket whooping with glee as she went.

God, that whole day was a blur. She'd finally gotten introduced to the kid Stark had spent half a decade raving about, and that interaction, however small, still stayed fresh in her mind.

"I'm Peter Parker."

"Hey, Peter Parker. You got something for me?"

So she'd gone off with Stark's gauntlet and damn near lost it to Thanos when he'd used one of the Xorrian artifacts to knock her back. She had spent the rest of the fight repelling the forces trying to take on Talos and Soren and Yesereth and the rest of the Skrulls that this Doctor Strange guy had apparently gotten in contact with. She still had no idea how he'd done that. But suddenly all of them began to dissolve at once and everyone had been cheering for a while, and then the news passed down the lines that Stark had died.

They had all kneeled then, and she'd only done it because everyone else was doing it, supposedly out of a sign of respect or something like that, but she knew her reaction was very muted compared to the others. The second that had gotten really awkward, she'd been the first to get up and head back over to the Skrulls and check up on them. She did exchange a brief handshake with T'Chaka's children, T'Challa and Shuri, who she had never gotten the chance to properly introduce herself too. Good, earnest kids, she gave them both a warm smile she'd genuinely felt, she was very eager for a chance to talk to them when she got a chance.
The reaction from the Skrulls was to continue cheering until Barton had gone running up to them screaming curses (goddammit, why was that bastard still alive?), and then they had to all explain at once that they were cheering about Thanos being dead, and who the hell did they care about one Terran who wasn't Carol or Fury or a Rambeau. Barton and Talos had almost come to blows and Carol had had to separate them both, and then the process began of transporting everyone back to their respective locations through the strange bearded man with the living cape and his friends who made weird force fields with their hands.

Talos and Soren and Yesereth stayed behind, Khn'nr had led the rest of the Skrulls back to Tarnax through the portal that Doctor Strange opened up for them, the battlefield slowly emptied as various faction leaders gave each other their regards and exchanged info. There would eventually be a really big party on the remnants of the New Avengers facility for all the survivors, but that party was one that Carol herself did not attend, nor did most of the "top brass."

She had approached Doctor Strange and asked him rather pointedly to create a portal to Centauri-IV, and when he asked why, Talos gave him such a severe look that he did so anyway, glaring and muttering about "wasting time." It was a shock for him to see two women on the other side of it staring at them, and then hesitantly stepping through, and then all of them embraced at the same time, causing Strange to turn off the portal and continue scoffing about "how an esteemed Doctor such as myself shouldn't be wasted with trifles."

To which Talos had said "trifle" and laughed so hard that Strange had teleported him ten feet in the air and let him fall, and he hit the ground and continued laughing as hard as he possibly could. God, Carol had missed him. Strange had motioned to Yesereth and said "talk with me later" before teleporting away. And then they were among the last on the battlefield as Rhodes and Potts gingerly tried to move Stark's corpse, which was so goddamn morbid that Carol stepped in, using the photon energy to lift him softly off the ground and walked with him back to whatever was left of the building as the two of them held each other and sobbed. That Peter Parker kid followed at a distance, also crying, and Maria and Monica walked next to him and began to quietly talk to him, which made him cry even more. Carol felt bad for the kid, but if someone was gonna do it, it had to be her.

The talk of every single person returning was in itself an exaggeration as well. Banner had tried his hardest in those small moments of almost infinite godlike power. His sentient mind was as close as it got. He did his best, but not everyone had come back. He hadn't restored everything to as it had been before. It had been noted already that only sentient life had been targeted, which meant that on C-53 only Terrans had died. No dogs, no cats, nothing else, leaving lots of strays. A lot of people took their own lives after. Some died of terminal illnesses they no longer had anyone to help them combat. A lot more had died, hundreds of millions more, in the resulting chaos. The same could be said on every planet in the Spiral Arms with sentient life. The Avengers, what was left of them, could only do so much by themselves, and those five years had been so hard because of how intimate everyone had become with death who may not have been intimate with it before. Carol was immensely used to death. It didn't phase her the same way. That had always bothered everyone, as happy as they were to have someone with her abilities around. She was never happy about it, but her reactions had always been muted.

Suddenly, half the population re-appeared. Millions more would die. Spouses had remarried or died, people had moved on. Millions more took their own lives. Millions who had terminal illnesses pre-Blip had them upon returning. It had been a mercy then, that some measures had been put into place. Not nearly as many died this time around. Resources had been prepared. Resettlement facilities run by the communities themselves had been established. Billions were
donated by Stark Industries free of charge to those communities just for such an occasion. Stark and Potts had matured in those five years. Carol could give the billionaire bastards that much. They had given so much away that they were now merely millionaires, but those billions had been crucial when nobody else was willing to. Not that most of them had them anymore, most of them had to give them up after all those riots Carol had conveniently done nothing about. She imagined that bald guy who looked like a real life version of Lex Luthor probably wouldn't forgive her, but what was he gonna do? The one who had that Oscar-winning movie made about his life probably wouldn't either.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------

She and Stark hadn't talked much in the five years they'd known each other. He'd call her "New Blood" a lot. She'd gotten to meet Morgan once she was born and got to hold her, which had made her very nervous as the infant grabbed at her hands and she worried that she might accidentally break her fingers just by moving. They'd all shown up for the baby shower and then the birth, and that had been the first time she and Stark had ever had a full conversation, a real one.

It had been made abundantly clear (though not by Carol herself) that there was some unresolved animosity between them. Not nearly as much as there was between Carol and Barton. He had rubbed her the wrong way almost immediately, and she had still concluded that the majority of them having this awkward sexual tension all the time really was not safe for the only group that could adequately defend the planet, or that Romanoff kept defending him no matter what he did. It helped that nobody else but the original Avengers seemed to have any kind of fondness for him, which in turn made those like Rocket and Nebula and Korg like Carol more. As fellow outsiders to C-53, they could at least identify with how private their lives had become so that whatever Terrans they ran into wouldn't panic.

Carol's animosity towards Stark, though never expressed openly like she did with Barton, was a much subtler thing, because for whatever reason, the goddamn billionaire always wanted her around. I think it was because she had been the only one who could've rescued him and Nebula (the android was always at the Stark residence, always confused by parents being kind to their child). She had read Fury's file on her and knew there was no way in hell they'd know anything more about her than what the public knew.

The conversation with Rogers had largely comforted everyone to at least know she and the Rambeaus and those three Skrulls she was always around wouldn't try anything. The woman imbied with the Xorrian artifact that had made their lives hell for so long was certainly a matter of suspicion, though it had been gratifying to learn that at least one other person seemed to have been imbied by each of them. Jane Foster, a scientist who had once been romantically involved with Thor, had become imbied with Carol's old nemesis, the Aether, and she certainly would not wish that even on Yon-Rogg or Zen-Pram. The two Maximoff twins, both dead, had become imbied with the one described as the Mind Stone (no catchy name for that one), a Stephen Strange had become imbied with the Time Stone, some guy Rocket kept crying about called Peter Quill had become imbied with the Power Stone (technically, all of that group had been), and of course good old Johann with the Soul Stone.

That list was scrawled in Stark's handwriting on a whiteboard he kept in his new office at the cabin that he'd taken after spending enough of his assets on the rebuilding process to make him merely a millionaire.

**SPACE - DANVERS**
**REALITY - FOSTER**
**POWER - QUILL**
It was already known by now, as Carol was a horrible liar, that she knew exactly who the Soul Stone had chosen and had even seen it in person years before it would be used, but she wasn't about to say. It was not her business, and the last thing she needed was Rogers to try and head over there to fight Johann and lose when there was a home planet to manage. Rogers had every right to be that angry, of course, but it was one more stressor that the remaining Avengers did not need. They certainly were a little suspicious of her for it, but Carol had long since stopped bothering with whether or not other people liked her.

Not to mention that out of all those, all Terrans, imbied with the artifacts, only Carol and Johann had survived Thanos. She suspected that Johann couldn't be killed regardless of the cause, but he was definitely still there on Vormir, definitely still playing chess with either Monica or Yesereth if memory served. It was a welcome respite, a home away from home, and so long as neither one of them went up to that mountain where you'd have to sacrifice yourself or someone else for it, it was as safe as could be.

But then she and Stark did hash it out, and though they'd never ever truly become friends, there was at least an earned respect between them. Stark had done a lot of unforgivable things in Carol's mind, from consolidating multiple corporate entities into the Raft, to gaslighting that Parker kid with a bunch of messes that had been his fault to begin with, to creating the android that destroyed an entire Eastern European country in one go, the list went on and on. Stark seemed to have good intentions, yet at the same time he was a highly manipulative person who tended to cause the threats to innocent life by accident that he'd have to put out.

Stark's estimation of her was a little different. On the one hand, the man had never admitted to himself that despite his immense fame and wealth, he had held Fury in high regard as a person who had never been impressed by him like everyone else was. He was nothing if not a slave to his own bad habits, and Fury refusing to ever validate him resulted in him subconsciously seeking his approval and almost replicating the relationship he'd had with his own father. That being said, Fury had occasionally let slip over the years about "the last resort" or "who you were named after," always vague. Coulson, while he was alive or dead or whichever he was in whatever weird shit he got up to in the last several years, knew about this person too and had been sworn to secrecy, though he hadn't ever had more than a few minutes of interaction at a time with them. That this person, right before he was about to starve to death in a spaceship named after a 1970s pop star by someone described by his android friend as "biological life at its dumbest and horniest," had abruptly been rescued and had their ship carried across half a solar system by that very person. To be fair, Carol had been really exhausted after and having to do that and fight Thanos within the same week had tired the hell out of her, but she hadn't let them see it.

On the other, he was the de facto leader of the Avengers (self-appointed) and this interloper didn't ever obey orders from anyone else or really pay anyone much mind. She wasn't outright rude to anyone, and someone as deeply insecure as Stark could recognize someone compensating with projected arrogance well enough. Her little tiff with Barton was concerning, though it seemed that nobody outside of himself, Rogers and Romanoff even wanted him around. It was encouraging to see that Thor and Banner seemed to like her, but Stark, again, wanted everyone to like him, and rankled at anyone who wouldn't.

This was a complicated series of discussions that Carol didn't entirely remember. She had a vicious anti-authoritarian streak and Stark used to be one of the wealthiest people on the planet. They were both genetically designed to butt heads, the working class girl from Massachusetts and the
billionaire from New York. But they had hashed it out. She was real nice to his kid and resolved a
couple major situations that came up over the next five years. It was clear that her wife and
surrogate daughter loved her dearly, and those three Skrulls who went everywhere with her viewed
her like family. There was a beating heart under all that perceived power. Stark would die not
having admitted the truth as to why the two of them could never be friends, and it was something
Carol, for all her own insecurities, would never realize: Stark had been afraid of her.

She and Rogers would grab a bite sometimes, sometimes she’d fly to Norway and try to convince
Thor to go out on a walk with her, and Monica and Korg would excitedly play Fortnite together.
She spent a varying amount of time with each of them. She and Rocket would head off sometimes
to the remnants of Planet Ego and sip some intergalactic brewskis aboard the Benatar. He’d tell her
about Yondu and Groot and Gamora and Drax and Quill, and sometimes the Rambeaus and the
Skrulls and Nebula would join.

She had let people in, slowly but surely. Still dearly missing Fury, but also knowing what he had to
do during the years where she had skipped through time and he had to wait for her, possibly
forever. The damned old man was her best friend and she was going to make sure his work would
continue. Even after SHIELD, he had done better work than ever.

She and Rhodes would go to the gym in the New Avengers Facility together and spot each other.
She had gotten to take the Rambeaus and Skrulls to visit Wakanda for a tour from Okoye and they
spent a few days there together. The nation was mourning the deaths of T’Challa and Shuri and so
many of their citizens, but they were doing the best they could under the circumstances. She was
sad that the Hulk and Banner eventually seemed to combine into one, though she’d still have
Banner join her for coffee, even if his constant talk of equations went completely over her head. It
was nice to listen sometimes.

Barton had vanished and had a tendency to go after people in a ridiculous anime-inspired suit, and
Romanoff would fret and worry and whenever she’d get a hold of him and Carol was there, she’d
half jokingly tell him to kill some Neo-Nazis and then the next day or week he’d inevitably take her
on her word. Romanoff eventually told her to stop, and Carol did so, but she still was hoping
Barton could take more of them out when he got a chance.

Goose had been a well-known fixture for a while now, though no one had found out what she
actually was. She mainly stayed with Carol and the Rambeaus now, they’d each gotten their own
room in the Facility, though they rarely used them. The flerken had become a favorite of all the
Avengers, though they never learned till much later that she was more than an ordinary kitty cat.

Carol just did not want to stay with the rest of them all the time. She did, however, get a huge kick
out of the now rather elderly Junior Danvers when she brought him there to meet Rogers. She got a
right kick out of that. Junior and Carol would spend some time together every now and again and
try and reconnect, she got to meet her nieces and nephews at long last and reveal who she was.
They were all nice enough, but she felt that same sort of distance she felt with Junior himself. Her
sister-in-law was like the kids, nice enough. Two years later, Junior would die of a major stroke,
having a genetic predisposition for them that Carol only avoided because of her exposure to the
Tesseract way back in 1989. Attending the funeral was the last Carol would ever see of her
biological family.

Maria and Monica being revealed as alive as everyone else had died had come as a huge shock to
the remnants of Frank’s family, especially since Frank himself had died in the Blip. Minus the
Skrulls, they went awkwardly back to New Orleans for his funeral, and they sat off by themselves.
and said nothing. As for the Skrulls, they were all mourning their lost, though nobody else in Talos and Soren's unit had died. The Blip had been random and inconsistent, just as they'd predicted.

Five years had gone by in that way. Five relatively quiet years, all things considered. Minus the Neo-Nazis and other agitators of that ilk, the people of C-53 were mostly just commiserating and sad. A lot had taken their own lives, after all, and in retrospect, this would in turn cause a lot of the people from the Blip to do the same once they'd returned. Talos morbidly deemed this as the "Romeo and Juliet effect" after the fact, having gotten a chance to read Shakespeare's plays and finding them immensely confusing.

Carol still had to go all over the place with the rest of the gang (Monica kept on insisting that they were called the "Carol Corps" and unlike Captain Marvel, Carol fought hard for that name not to become official), all over the Spiral Arms to deal with the fallout. Still plenty of intergalactic threats. She nearly died plenty of times, so did the rest of the Carol Corps. There were a lot of close calls, but Fury was missed.

Frigga's death had hit them all hard, and it had hit worse after the Blip and realizing there was no way to get her back. She had been an unofficial member of the Carol Corps, after all.

Nothing ever as severe as Zen-Pram, however. Nothing had beaten Zen-Pram in trauma, and even Thanos had gotten a muted reaction from all of them thanks to how used they were to universal threats. He had taken out more than anyone else, but that desensitization had gotten to them. They'd been seeing the therapist that Fury had initially hired, called Skivorski, for quite some time now, but after the Blip, Potts had finally put her foot down and insist that all remaining Avengers and associates begin to go, free of charge. With all the extra work, Skivorski hired more people to help treat more of the metahuman community, so folks like Ashley Kafka and Valerie Cooper joined his staff to provide further assistance. That did help, to some degree. They'd fly over in the Skrull ship to his office in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which had been paid for by Stark Industries and had green energy converters installed, solar panels, the whole deal.

Five years came and went.

But then, the Kree remnants had surfaced on Centauri-IV, trying to get enough assimilated to restart them as a proper fighting force sans a Supreme Intelligence, and the Carol Corps bid farewell to C-53 for a little while, forfeiting their potential place in the plot to retrieve the Xorrian artifacts (Carol personally didn't think it was worth trying, nor was she interested in any more time skips, but she was happy in retrospect to be proven wrong). This had given her the opportunity to briefly interact with a man called Scott Lang who had apparently been trapped in something called a Quantum Realm for five years, and he was overly enthusiastic, a bit hyper-active, but a pleasant sort overall. She wished him the best before leaving.

And then, there they were on Centauri-IV, fighting off the Kree remnants, and then the call from Rogers came in and she came as fast as she could and she took her part in saving the Spiral Arms, just as Frigga had predicted all those years ago.

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She hadn't said a word to anyone at Stark's funeral. Not even to Fury. That had been the most stunning moment, was getting a phone handed to her by Potts and saying it was important. She had remained impassive, both of them had, just sort of casually telling each other that it had been a while. And then the phones clicked off and they made excuses to be alone and they cried by themselves for a while until Maria made an excuse to go see her and hold her for a while. It was happy tears of relief, happy that Scott Lang's stupid gamble had worked after all. Fury had no one to comfort him in a similar way. He was far too proud to let them catch him. His biggest fear is that
he'd gotten so old that he and Carol could not relate to each other anymore.

The last thing he said before being dusted was "mother--" and the first thing he said, spawning right back onto what had once been a busy metropolitan street near the Atlanta branch of SHIELD, had been "--fucker," and then Maria Hill slapped him.

His second question was to ask where the fuck Goose had ran off to.

Monica had been settling things on her own after word had spread that Thanos and the Black Order had properly died and that the Spiral Arms had been saved on C-53. In her own words, Auntie Carol needed a break after so many continuous years of conflict, and Carol let her, for the first time letting Monica go off on her own. The effects of the artifacts had slowed her aging as well, she looked about in her early twenties now, and Maria in her early forties, and they'd remain that way a while. Carol in between in her early thirties, appearance wise, it was so strange to get used to even now.

Even though Carol had been around for a good couple decades now and had fully relearned English, she and Maria would still jokingly use the phrasing she used to use post-assimilation. "Mouth presses" and "Terran customs" and so on. They had definitely engaged in some of those as soon as the fighting had properly finished.

Then it had been the funeral, with only Carol and Fury being invited, and despite how badly they wanted to hug each other, they remained as impassive and casual as ever, with only the slightest of smiles to indicate that their initial reactions to each other were in fact the very same and that they shouldn't think otherwise. They both stayed near the back and ignored everyone else.

One more unexpected visitor had surprised her, someone by the name of Grant Buchanan.

She had realized she hadn't actually seen or talked to him in quite a while. She'd spent all these years in perpetual conflict and she hadn't kept up with anyone outside of her inner circle. She'd only seen him and Peggy a few times and after Peggy had died, she hadn't talked to him at all. They'd always acted as if no time had passed at all despite how long she'd go between visits, and after Peggy had died, she'd only spoken to Buchanan a couple more times. That was a huge regret of hers. She felt like an ass about that, and said so.

"I honestly don't care one bit," Buchanan said.

They sat on a bench together overlooking the lake next to Stark's home. They just stared a while.

"Do you miss Peggy?"

"Of course. But I was prepared. I knew that if I did everything right, I would know the exact day she died."

"I don't understand--"

"Pardon me, is that your grandfather?"

They looked up to see Rogers, dressed in that strange suit Stark had designed for their Quantum Realm exploits, holding a briefcase and one of Thor's hammers that he'd been using in that final battle.

"No," said Buchanan, "I'm an old friend from back in the day."

Rogers' head cocked just like a dog as he gave Buchanan a strange look, and after several seconds,
he said slowly:

"What's your name?"

Carol said, "His name is--"

"William Burnside. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

They shook hands, but Rogers still gave him an extremely confused look, and turned back to Carol.

"Sorry we don't have more time to talk, Mr. Burnside. I'm going to have to return them," he said, nodding at the briefcase containing the Xorrian artifacts. "So it's probably going to be a while before we get to see each other again." Carol couldn't help but give a longing look at it, and Rogers' head cocked like a dog again. Both he and Buchanan smiled at the same time and he opened up the case, showing her them, all of their containers shattered, all in their true forms.

"May I?" Carol asked, and Rogers softly nodded. She reached out and took the Tesseract out of the case, making very sure not to touch any of the others, she could even see slight warps and distortions near each of them as they all seemed to recognize her. She held the small blue gem, so much smaller than the cube she'd gotten to know, and looked at it sadly. As if on cue, she saw Goose slinking up to them, and though she had enough sense not to try and eat it again, she still stared at it attentively as Fury gave them all a very confused look from afar.

Carol was not sure why she was feeling so emotional about a rock, but it was alive in its own sort of way, and she could somehow tell that it and none of its siblings ever intended any harm. They were the last of a species so far advanced than any Terran could ever reach and they knew they'd have to be separated and alone for all eternity to keep reality safe. The Tesseract, in particular, had been a part of her life for so many years. It had made her Vers, and it had made her Carol again. It felt like family. They all did, in a way. She could even feel the Aether playfully teasing her about the whole Zen-Pram debacle, as if to say, no hard feelings, asshole.

"Goodbye," Carol said softly, impulsively leaning forward and kissing the gem, and then put it back in the case, fully expecting Rogers and Buchanan to laugh, but they just had identical somber and grim expressions on their faces. Rogers took the case back and shut it softly.

"You stay safe out there," Carol said, and she got up and hugged him, which he returned despite the hammer and the briefcase. "And uh, this might sound strange, but when you're going to Vormir, keep an open mind, will you?"

"Keep protecting us, Captain," Rogers said with a nod, and began heading off to a metallic portal with Banner and those two friends of his, Barnes and Wilson, waiting for him. They couldn't see Carol but they could see him.

"How come you didn't use your real name?" Carol asked him.

"This is why," Buchanan said, handing her something made out of paper. It was an old newspaper, a record of the people associated with destroying one of the Red Skull's prisons way back during the 1940s. It had been ripped to the point where only two names were there, in very faded ink, and Carol gave him a strange look.

"What's this?"

"Read," Buchanan said, nodding at the paper.

She read:
She blinked. She blinked several times. She could faintly hear Rogers talking with the other three behind her, the hum of the portal beginning to activate itself, but time seemed to stand still, all at once. How the hell--

"I'm surprised no one else noticed," Steven Rogers said next to her.

"How are there two of you?"

"Someone's got to close the loop," Rogers said, "and I had no way of knowing if it closed until I saw myself doing what I myself had to do so many years ago. I went to a lot of places after that. I met with Schmidt, and realized you'd met him too. We talked a while."

"How did that go?" Carol said quietly.

"Awkward. But it was...surprising, to say the least."

The portal began to hum as the Steve Rogers wearing the suit stepped onto it.

"I'll explain everything later," Buchanan said, "but I want a moment with them first."

He shooed Carol away, who walked quickly back to the rest of the attendants, standing back next to Fury on the porch and leaning against the wall, as she heard Barnes and Wilson begin talking to...Rogers.

"You found out too, huh?" Fury said.

"How the hell did he keep it from us for over twenty goddamn years?" Carol asked, "Were we really that stupid?"

"I guess," Fury said, and the two of them couldn't be in Professional Mode after that and they burst out laughing so hard that that kid Peter Parker and his legal guardian (aunt?) turned and looked at them, with a very confusing look.

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But the invitation that came after, delivered by one of Potts' drones, had invited everyone. Rambeaus, Skrulls, everyone.

The Facility was still trashed and the couple of miles the battle had taken place in was desolate and ruined. So they had a massive tent erected right next to it, large enough for a thousand people or so to be able to mingle and interact, even if spirits were somewhat higher than they were during the infamous party five years earlier. Carol had gotten a kick out of seeing the Runaways nearly grown and Tyrone and Tandy in their early twenties.

This meant that she had a lot of new people to talk to, and this time nobody tried to avoid anyone else, and so Carol pushed her way through small talk as best she could, but mentally she was cataloguing the newcomers:

James Barnes

Bucky himself. Holy goddamn. He was in a lot of the serials too as Captain America's sidekick, dressed in this really awkward outfit with a domino mask. He really hated those, apparently. He
got turned into a HYDRA secret agent or some shit? I've heard about all this from Fury but he's just this really stoic guy with a robot arm. Rocket is very obsessed with stealing it from him. He doesn't say a whole lot, he just stayed right by Rogers and never moved and after all of that, I get it.

Sam Wilson

He's a cocky dude, especially because five years went by for him in a second, but he's nice enough. Much like Barnes, he's stuck to Rogers like glue and refused to move. They were a bit surprised to discover that me and Fury know too, and we all had to have an awkward conversation where we swore to keep referring to him as Buchanan. He just wants to live out his final days knowing that he's been able to close off the loop. He's already known as Peggy Carter's husband to these guys, so we're gonna have to keep living that lie for however long the old bastard has left.

Stephen Strange

Met him briefly during the fight when I demanded that he transport Maria and Monica to C-53. I think he's still kinda peeved at me for asking for that kind of favor so flippantly right after Stark had died. Personally, it saves on transport costs if you know a magic wizard guy who can do that with no effort whatsoever. He's kind of arrogant and full of himself, but seemed to soften a bit upon meeting Monica, who was extremely impressed by him. He and Ysereth spent a while mind-melding and I think she genuinely impressed him.

Wong

Wong didn't die in the Blip, but we'd also never met until now. He had been sort of a Acting Sorcerer Supreme for the past five years, as he described it, managing everyone as best he could. It's implied he's going to continue in this role at least for a little while longer so Strange can get acclimated to things again. He invited me to visit the New York Sanctum when I had a free moment, which I'm definitely going to get Monica and Ysereth to visit. Advantage of time skips: Monica and Ysereth are the same age again and are the best of friends, and that's so good for them both. He's a nice enough guy who was really furious to discover that there were no tuna melts.

T'Challa

Spitting image of his dad, it's ridiculous. Not to say that he's got the same personality, and I didn't meet T'Chaka that many times, but he was cracking jokes left and right and was a much more relaxed guy overall. Seemed really enthused to be back, and it's unclear if him or his mother is going to be ruling. Possibly at the same time to avoid any confusion. He was really jazzed to meet me because I guess his dad had told him about me. He is insisting that a Wakandan tour supervised by Okoye must've been a living hell so I've got to go back with the whole gang sometime, and then Okoye lovingly hit him in the ribs.

Nakia

T'Challa's girlfriend, I think. Their label is a little unclear. She was actually given the chance to become Queen and refused so she could continue to fight imperialists and oil companies and whoever else. Lots of industrial sabotage. She's even funnier than he is, kept on teasing Okoye mercilessly the entire night. But it's clear that she's not to be trifled with, though she seems to have kind of a soft spot for Monica and offered to train her in combat. Very sweet offer, I might go for some pointers too.
Shuri

T'Challa's little sister, the Princess of Wakanda, and a certifiable genius at that. Supposedly the smartest human being on C-53, and after a lengthy and spirited argument with Banner, I'm inclined to agree with the notion. Even at the party she was tinkering with all sorts of things and created a bunch of little gadgets for fun. Very similar to what I do but hers are a hell of a lot more advanced than my stuff is, I was making little windup toys while she's making grenades out of paper clips. Loves referencing a defunct website called Vine, and she has introduced me to some and Monica wouldn't stop laughing.

M'Baku

He's apparently in charge of the Jabari Tribe, who had spent a while split off from the rest of the Wakandans but now are more or less resolved as far as their differences are concerned. He and T'Challa apparently hated each other when they were younger, which is confusing because they act like siblings and actually began playfighting. He's got the same powers as T'Challa minus the kinetic suit and a playful punch to my shoulder left a bruise. He kept on pranking people by pretending that he was vegan and pretending to be offended and the only one who didn't fall for it, naturally, was Yesereth. He absolutely can't get enough of her, he kept on trying to get her to read people's minds and I don't think she's ever been so flustered before!

Wanda Maximoff

I got a brief glimpse of her handing the Purple Bastard his ass. She's a very cold and severe person. Not to say that she was necessarily unpleasant, but she's a very guarded sort. Her boyfriend, some kind of weird android guy, was killed by him. We had a conversation about her Jewish and Romani heritage, which was pretty interesting to learn about. She's got the genuine feeling of being an outside wherever she goes. Strangely enough, she's the only one there who Barton was really getting along with, he apparently took her on as a sort of informal protege way back when. Barton is still an ass, but I resolved not to be mean to him tonight.

Peter Quill

I was expecting to really dislike him after five years of Nebula loudly complaining about how he'd singlehandedly destroyed all life in both of the Spiral Arms because he couldn't keep his dick in his pants. To my surprise, Quill kinda freaked out upon seeing me and kept on talking about how he had been a huge fan of mine. Fan of what? I don't know. He tried giving me a hug and I rebuffed it. He's not nearly as rude as Nebula had claimed, he just comes off as a deeply overgrown child in a buff guy's body. Like a reverse-Rogers.

Drax

Drax is a very literal sort. He seems just as confused by interaction as I was, and he seemed to like my directness and vice versa. Found myself getting along with him a lot. He seemed incredibly chipper about the whole Blip thing, and was taking it far more in stride than literally anyone else there. Kept on cracking wise with a young woman with antenna calling herself Mantis, and had this very older sibling kinda vibe with everyone he talked to. Insulted Quill a lot, which me and Rocket equally appreciated.

Groot

This is the one Rocket had missed the most. I haven't ever encountered a Groot before, all with the same name, but this Groot is unique because he says "I am Groot," instead of just Groot. This isn't
even with a translator, he's literally speaking Terran as a way of communicating in his own unique language. Monica called him a Pokemon, which confused everyone but me. I don't know his language so one of the other Guardians or Thor had to be nearby in order to translate for him. Thor apparently took Groot as an elective?

**Mantis**

She used to be in the charge of Ego, who was Quill's father? I'd chewed out Fury something fierce for not telling me about that until months after he'd destroyed an entire town in Missouri and many other areas of planets in the exact same size. Millions dead. Ridiculous. Anyway, she's a very literal sort as well, and liked to predict emotions, and induced a laughing fit in me as a prank. I was laughing too hard to even be angry with her about it. She and Yesereth also got along a lot considering their similar abilities.

**Gamora**

Gamora wasn't actually there. We had interacted briefly while she was helping me get the gauntlet to Scott Lang and Hope van Dyne (or is it Hope Pym? She wouldn't tell me), and a little afterwards as everyone was beginning to cart bodies off the battlefield. She and Nebula approached me briefly, made me swear I wouldn't tell any of the others that they had gone, and left. Gamora is the other adopted child of the Purple Bastard. She and Quill were a thing, but for convoluted reasons I still don't understand, she's from a different time.

**Scott Lang**

We'd interacted ever so briefly before Stark's death, but the party was the first chance to talk to him. He was there with Hope (his girlfriend?) and his daughter Cassie, who immediately took to Monica and Yesereth. Weirdly enough, his ex-wife and her husband were there as well, though I only managed a brief greeting. They were a little awestruck by the whole thing, and so was Scott. He was just sad that Rogers had "vanished," and Barnes and Wilson and I kept on exchanging sly grins whenever he'd wax on about "America's ass" for god knows what reason. I don't know what he's referring to. He's confusing. Nice, but confusing.

**Hope van Dyne**

Hope didn't talk to many other people besides her parents and Scott and his daughter's family. That whole unit kept mostly to themselves, she seemed very focused on doing more research on the Pym Particles that they'd used for their weird time bullshit caper they still won't fully explain to me. Lang has tried, but Lang isn't the brightest. Hope tried, but Hope is such a math nerd type that it all went completely over my head and made me feel dumb. English was always my strong suit in school. She did demonstrate the neat suit that she's got and all the blasters and shit she had added to it. She and Scott raced and both of them collided with Banner's giant glass of wine at the exact same time, leading to everyone thinking he was making a toast. So he did. In binary. It took half an hour. I think both of them ended up getting a concussion in the process.

**Hank Pym and Janet van Dyne**

Those two were in each other's arms the entire night. They slow danced on the dance floor (Maria made me blush by insisting that I dance with her in front of everyone!), they fed each other shrimp cocktails, they had a Talos/Soren vibe with their love affair. Apparently Janet had been trapped in the Quantum Realm for ages and they'd only recently been reunited. They're old, I can't relate to them.
Ava Starr

I've met her once before, actually. She was one of the poor souls shipped off to the Raft after the Blip and she handled that as well as she possibly could, given the circumstances. I think Fury feels guilty about her, he'd been sponsoring her treatment and she still won't say exactly what happened in there. I think I might give her my info if she ever feels like she wants to talk, she's very shy and introverted.

Maria Hill

God, I get so confused by her, especially because she's got the same first name as the woman I've been seeing for the last twenty or so magical years. We both had to admit that she was cute as hell, but we're already standoffish enough, and we've never tried adding a third person into the mix. OK fine, she's cute, at least Maria thinks so too. She's kind of a wet blanket as far as personality is concerned, too severe and military minded for our liking. Wanted to talk to Fury about strategy and other random bullshit the whole time, and it was obvious that after all this time, Fury no longer gives a damn about anything. Talos has offered to switch places.

Sharon Carter

Peggy's granddaughter? Grand-niece? I think it's grand-niece. Buchanan and her were cordial, despite them being related, and he eventually had to admit that while he was Rogers, the two of them made out once. Holy fucking damn. It took everything in me not to laugh and I had to get drinks with Barnes and Wilson and Maria later on before the four of us collectively lost our goddamn shit at the fact that Rogers is...more incestuous than we ever fucking expecting. Holy shit. She's kinda like Maria Hill, every former SHIELD type except Fury has no personality to speak of, the military sands the edges. Maria is the only one who has apparently made it through basic training with her humanity intact, I guess. Fury, too, but I like to make fun of him so I won't say that to his face.

Morgan Stark

I've met Morgan already, but we didn't interact often. I'm not good with kids who weren't Monica or Yesereth. She's a sweetheart, nothing like her dad (though I never said that to her face), but clearly got that intellect too. She is really dealing with her dad's death with as much maturity as a five year old can muster. She's gotten the idea in her head that she's going to be a superhero like her parents and use her mom's suit (which Potts has been calling "Rescue" for some reason). Hope she is dissuaded from that notion. This is not something I would wish on my worst enemy. I don't want her becoming all jaded like I can be. She kept asking me if I could fly fast enough and far away enough to find her dad and I did not know how to answer that.

Leonard Skivorski

Dr. Skivorski, the "superhero therapist." What a reputation he's developed. I've known him for years now, and since his own gamma radiation exposure way back, he's gotten some enhancements of his own, something to do with his hair? He's not fond of fighting but I've seen him in action and I wouldn't want to mess with him. Otherwise, he's been a life saver for me and Maria and Monica. Glad to see that he was able to help Banner and others so much. Such a gentle soul otherwise. Never met with him socially before.

And finally...

Peter Parker
I was dreading the party because of him. Not because of him personally, he comes off like a really sweet and earnest kid. I was dreading seeing him there because his aunt had approached me right before everyone left Stark's funeral and asked me if he could talk to me for a little bit. I said no, I made up an excuse about having to debrief for Fury, and then made the mistake of saying that I could talk to him at the party I'd heard Potts was arranging for everyone instead. I wasn't avoiding him so much as hoping we wouldn't cross paths, but eventually there he was, and he gave me such an expectant look that I had to walk over and give him a hug and introduce myself.

I wasn't really sure what he wanted. We had only interacted briefly during the fight. We walked outside the tent and looked over at the carnage that Purple Bastard had raised. He's only sixteen years old, and he would've been fully grown if not for Purple Bastard. I'd definitely heard of him all the time from Stark and Potts and Rogers, he'd made a good impression on them. I had torn into Stark during a particularly tense moment about how he had no one to blame but himself for Parker's death and the others had gotten mad but he hadn't stopped me and agreed. I had apologized. Stark would still invite me over sometimes to talk about younger Fury and my impressions of him and his dad, shooting the shit about whatever. He was only a year younger than me and yet I looked half his age.

I saw his aunt looking out at us for a second from the tent, and then turn back to talk to that security guy, Happy something.

He just sat down and looked out over it for a while. He was looking at the burn mark that signified where Stark had activated the gauntlet and functionally killed himself to kill Thanos. He'd been a ways off, he'd been near me fighting alongside Shuri taking out a whole host of Chitauri footsoldiers, he wasn't doing nothing. I'd seen them excitedly talking to each other and him asking her for advice on how to win the affections of a girl in his class called Michelle. Apparently she's the daughter of an old colleague of Banner's called Richard Jones.

I actually did realize why he wanted to talk to me, because I was technically the last one to see Stark before activating the gauntlet, the last to see him in a coherent state. He'd been so badly burned by it, the same burn that had permanently damaged Banner's arm when he'd rescued everyone, only surviving because of the Hulk, that he had basically gone into shock. I was the one who saw him snap his fingers from afar and I was the last one to try and stop Thanos before Stark got to him.

Quite frankly, I worried that he was internally wishing I'd killed myself instead, so he could have Stark.

"Peter," I said finally, "me and Stark weren't close."

"You weren't?"

"No, not at all. We socialized at times. He'd invite me over. I met his daughter. But we weren't friends."

"Did you dislike him?"

"Less so the longer I got to know him."

"Oh."

I was mentally slapping myself for not saying something nicer. I had no place in this story. I was friendly with him but not his friend, that's how I was with a lot of them. I nearly came to blows with Barton, for crying out loud. I was at a funeral of a person I only knew casually, but then again,
most here only knew him by association. Peter was apparently very close.

"Peter, I don't want to be blunt, but why did you want to talk to me?"

"I can't talk to Thor, he's a god. I can't talk to Rhodes or Bucky or Wilson, they just see me as a kid. I can't talk to anyone else because I don't know them very well. I can't talk to Shuri because she's my age and she Blipped out too."

"I don't know most of them either, Peter. I've had my own things to deal with."

"But you're a superhero. A proper one. They're all soldiers with extra tech, and I don't want to be that. You're like Mr. Stark and Mr. Rogers, you're a superhero too. I mean, I hadn't heard of you until the battle, to be honest--"

"I'm a little before your time, to be fair," I said, and Peter laughed for the first time.

"Yeah. I dunno, you were the one who took out time during the fight to look out for me. Nobody else did that. Not even Mr. Stark."

"Somebody had to, Peter. You handled yourself well out there. I wish we could've met under better circumstances."

"Me too," Peter said, "It's just that Mr. Stark and Mr. Rogers are gone, and now I don't know who's supposed to replace them."

"There was nothing to replace. One person can't protect a whole planet. I've tried."

"Have you?"

"It's a very long story, Peter."

After a very long silence, I added, "This hasn't been much of a pep talk, huh?"

Peter laughed. "It's been an awful pep talk. I thought superheroes were good at those."

"Good thing you're around, then."

"You did fight Thanos all by yourself."

"You wanna hear a secret?"

"Sure?"

"I'm not invincible. When he headbutted me, I thought I was going to die. I didn't let him see how much pain I'm in. That's the only time you don't show your emotion, when someone else is trying to kill you. My power is limited. For a few minutes, I can burst through a spaceship, and after that, I'm as human as you. I have a lot of limitations."

"Whoa. You didn't make it look that way."

"That makes all the difference, Peter. The other thing is making sure you know who you don't have to hide your pain from. You need people who don't see you as--what was it again?"

"Spider-Man."

"Thank god, I was hoping it wasn't something like 'Winter Soldier.'"
"You wanna hear a secret?"

"Sure, Peter."

"I used to pretend like I hadn't seen any of the Star Wars movies to mess with Mr. Stark. It was just something I'd do to make him feel really old and he'd always hated it so much."

"I've never seen that movie."

"You've never seen any of them? I wish they'd gotten a chance to release Episode IX but most of the cast had been Blipped."

"I haven't seen most movies."

"What was one you've seen?"

"Superman?"

"Seriously? Now that's old as shit."

"That came out like a year after the first Star Wars, dickweed."

Peter began to laugh again at that, eyes never moving from the huge burn mark on the battlefield. From back from the tent, Maria had poked her head out next to his Aunt May and gave me a wave. She blushed ever so slightly and waved back, and so did Peter, completely misreading the interaction. Maria and May began to quietly talk.

"Are you--" Peter began to ask.

"Peter, I'm gay," I said.

"Right on," Peter said, "I uh, still haven't decided. There's a girl in my class I like but I don't ever want to say I'd never be interested in guys too, I've got plenty of time to figure that out--"

"You do," I said, smiling again. "Good luck with the girl."

"Ah, she probably doesn't like me back."

"Just tell her you're Spider-Guy--"

"Spider-Man."

"Sure, that. Tell her that."

"I don't mean this in a weird way, but can I call you? Like for pointers, tips, anything?"

"OK," I said hesitantly, "I gotta give you a beeper, though."

"What for?"

"I don't have a phone and I've never had one. We'll be able to talk through it. I am not entirely sure where I'm going to live now that my home for the past five years has been destroyed by the Purple Bastard, but once I figure that out, you'll get a beeper. Don't expect to hear from me often, I've still got a lot of fires to put out."

"OK, great!" Peter said. He stuck out a hand to shake, and I took it.
"Thanks for the assistance, Captain Marvel."

"Anytime, Spider-Man."

---------------------------------------------------------------------------

They didn't talk again for six months.

Peter's identity had been revealed to the world and he'd called for the first time in a panic. Carol's identity had been known for a while but she asked if he wanted to hide off-world, to which he said he wasn't a coward. For her part, she did make a particularly nasty remark about J. Jonah Jameson when caught on camera, essentially threatening to disembowel him publicly. Carol had been at this for so long that she didn't really give a damn what media spin might be tried on her.

To avoid media attention, Morgan Stark would eventually go by her grandmother's maiden name, so that Morgan Carbonell could make it through her life without recognition. She still took her mother's armor and the name of Rescue, though. She didn't do this because of any particular resentment towards her father, she just didn't want to be recognized in public and she didn't want to put her mother in danger. She lived the life her father probably should've gotten to live. She turned out to be every inch the person her father couldn't be. The public still knew of the existence of a Morgan Stark, but that person was known to be reclusive and no photos of her as an adult were ever conclusively taken by the media. Morgan Carbonell's friends always teased that she must be named after Morgan Freeman.

As for Carol herself? Well, no matter what happened to everyone else, her path in life would never go as planned.

Chapter End Notes

This is the longest chapter yet! I got overexcited and put in a lot more stuff than was written on the outline, and because I wrote that at the same time, the ending has just been posted!

Now we are truly and well done with this, and I'm very nervous to see what you'll think of it, because it went somewhere I was not intending it to go when I first started this for shits and giggles all of two months ago.

The final chapter will also include a link (that's the best way, right?) to what I'm working on next, which is gonna be involving Ghost from Ant-Man and the Wasp and a lot of other characters you might recognize in a story very different from this one. I wanted to change it up. So if you've enjoyed this one, I hope you're willing to join me in a non-Carol story, though I will miss them all dearly.

We're almost there. See you on the other side.

- G
Carol would outlive Peter Parker. She'd outlive most of the others. Most of the Terrans would die. They'd be replaced. This happened enough times that Carol got very used to death, and didn't mourn like she'd used to.

The memories were fading fast now. She vaguely remembered something of a successor to take care of things on C-53, a young girl named Kamala, but she suspected she might've since died as well. Maria and Monica were still alive. But it was really just them now, Talos and Soren had since died. Yesereth was quite old herself, old for a Skrull.

Yesereth and Monica were both there, on Vormir. Goose was there, too. Monica looked older, middle-aged even, but still radiant, soon to be the last remnant of the Xorrian artifacts that would doom the galaxy. She had lived such a long life already. She had lived hundreds of years more, and so would Maria, both their lives intertwined into one.

She didn't remember what C-53 was like now. Whether or not humanity had survived. Monica may very well be the last Terran at the very end of it all. No way to know. She knew her time was imminent.

Carol Danvers had been born on October 1st, 1969 in Beverly, Massachusetts. She had lived so long. She had been a child once and dreamed of the view up there, and she had traveled farther than any Terran in history. She had gone till there was no more sky.

She could feel Maria's heartbeat next to her own. She felt Maria next to her, holding her softly, their skin ravaged by time and not even the Tesseract promising immortality. They both knew they were going to die soon.

Johann was there. He stood over them, watching softly. Monica and Yesereth didn't look particularly sad. They weren't happy, but they knew their parents and surrogate parents had lived long and fulfilling lives. It was all done now. Everything was done. They still had more to do and then they would die, and so life would go on, life accompanied by death.

Death, according to a book Monica had loved reading as a kid, was an awfully great adventure. The final frontier, to quote a show Maria had always really liked herself. Snippets of memory came back. That was all she saw there in her mind's eye.

She turned to Maria, and the two of them saw each other's lives as one as Yesereth placed a hand on each of their foreheads. They saw each other's lives from each other's perspectives, and smiled, face to face, hovering in midair. They began to rise, and Monica and Yesereth and Johann all helped, and they rose more and more and more and more and more into the sky.
They kept on going, millions of miles away, holding onto each other as they both began to glow brightly, Maria glowing too, expanding, the true power of the Xorrian artifact that had imbibed them releasing as they slowly let go of their corporeal forms.

The last words they whispered to each other had been the mantra they chanted before flying in the sky.

"Higher, further, faster, baby."

They ignited.

Vormir had been a lone planet without a star, and sunlight, true proper sunlight, shown down upon it for the first time in its history, warm and bright and just far enough away that new life could be spawned from it. The Xorrian artifact had returned home, the planet would take billions of years for it to form but it would form, and Johann would guide it along the way.

"Farewell," is all Johann said in response. Monica and Yesereth said nothing. They had more work to do.

We must confess at this time that we must translate from a language that does not yet exist to English. This is the closest approximation of what was said so far later on down in the distance, when all the characters of our story had been long dead and forgotten, save one.

Two beings stood upon a lake. We have never met them before. We shall call them Being 1 and Being 2. They were like no beings we have ever seen before. They looked nothing like we expected.

They had been guided. Life had been guided, by Johann. He did not wish to be their god, of course, and he sharply rebuffed any attempts by the being to be worshipped as such. "I was but a being once, so long ago, I would not make the same mistake twice."

Johann had guided them and nourished them for so long.

They stood now there, staring at the twin stars that shown in the sky. Their world was lush and full of abundant life of all sorts, always instructed never to take more than needed. Never more than that, never in excess. Never do anything that hurt anyone else. Never have a child you could not afford to feed. Exist only for the betterment of others. Simple lessons, lessons that had made them not a very numerous species but a very happy one. All they knew was happiness. Johann saw to it that disease did not exist and that their deaths were always peaceful and painless.

Johann was here now, with them. They were two of many, and they were quite young.

"Did you know that I knew those stars?" Johann said.

"Tell us about them."

"What is that star called?"

"That star was called," one of them said, in the only two remaining words of Terran language that remained aside from Johann's name, "Danvers. And that star is called Rambeau, and they provide us life."

"Indeed," said Johann, "but they were not always stars. For once they were beings, different but
also similar to yourselves."

"Tell us about them," the two beings demanded, as thousands of them had demanded before and demanded since. Johann had told this story so many times and never got tired of telling it. They were a small but nourished people.

"Indeed I shall," Johann said with a bony grin.

And he sat them down. And he did.

He told many.

He told you.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

God, I'm so nervous about this one. It definitely got weird, I'll admit it, but hopefully it worked.

Anyway! It's now time to reveal the next thingie I'm working on!

It's called Ghost in the Raft If you're wondering about what happened to Ava Star, aka Ghost from Ant-Man and the Wasp, then that's how you'll find out. Very different in tone than this one but if you've enjoyed this one, I really hope you'll want to join me for that lil yarn!

Thanks so much!

- G

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