Number Cruncher

by cauldronofdoom

Summary

Everyone he's ever worked with agrees Tony Stark is impulsive and reckless. If that's the case, though, why is he still around?

Notes

The prompt for this one asked for mind-reading and Tony not being actually reckless, just very, very smart.

“Well, this sucks.” Clint said, still trying to sort out his head after getting hit with that alien ray. He wasn’t physically injured, but this reading minds thing was really ridiculous. Like really ridiculous. From someone that fought every costumed pretender in New York, that was actually saying something. “Seriously, if I don’t hear anything but ‘don’t think about sex’ and Stark’s running monologue, I just might have to throw things at you all.”

He supposed he should just be grateful that he could only hear the thoughts of the people at the scene, but he really didn’t need Tony’s voice in his head cataloguing everyone’s blushes and rating them both on an impartial scale and a personal one *Tash’s eyes flicking away apparently ‘totally counts’ and is also a 6 on her embarrassment scale, even though it’s only a 0.5 on the general one
while Cap’s tomato face was an 8 for him and an 8.3 in general*, not to mention the sudden mental scream of ‘don’t think about sex’.

He buried his face in his hands, then snapped his head up and took a good look at the corner of the sheet on his medical ward bed. “Hey, you’re right! They did do a really good job darning that.” Then he glanced over at Tony *bug on the wall, Cap had helmet hair, Bruce needs to eat more, have JARVIS order some curry, Rhodey still needs to be given the newest repulsor upgrade, Nat’s shoulders are tense so she is not happy and Tony wants to be elsewhere, Pepper’s birthday’s coming up, shit that means abduction anniversary too, heat, sand, water, drowning, cold, need coffee, hey! That’ll fix the battery life problem with the newest Starkphone* and sighed heavily. “Sorry, man, nothing against you, but could you go grab a coffee or something?”

Tony just grinned at him, but under the layers of trivial information (seriously, did the guy see everything? His eyes weren’t as good as Clint’s, but anything he could see he did) and technology (four different machines being invented right goddamn now, what the hell) and his general concern for Clint (aww, he did so care) was a faint thread of *not wanted* that had Clint grabbing his arm before he could actually leave. “Thanks. It’s just… genius, you know? Your thought process is… well, really fucking amazing and more than a little overwhelming, that’s all. Your brain might be wired like that, but for me it’s like trying to stream video on broadband.”

Tony smile melted into something a little more sincere, and Clint actually heard bashfulness in the man’s mental voice. “It’s cool. Hey, since I’m apparently coffee boy, does anyone else want anything?”

* He’d been cleared to return to the mansion fairly quickly. Tony was the only one that really gave him any trouble, and the man was very good at giving Clint his space.

Thor’s mental voice was just alien and brought home more than anything else that he really wasn’t like the rest of them. However, it’s noise was quickly filed into background white noise that had a faintly liiac feel to it, as his brain couldn’t make enough sense of it for it to not get repetitive and get filtered out.

Bruce’s thoughts were even calm and controlled, just like the rest of him. There was an underlying mutter that made him think of nothing more than ‘red’ that he assumed was the anger the scientist called on when he pulled out the Hulk. As for his surface thoughts, those were either about science or calm and measured. They were as easy to push aside as idle chatter at the table next to you at a café.

Natasha still thought in Russian, oddly enough. Actual words didn’t usually come through unless she was actively thinking about them. The rest of the time it was closer to empathy with her than the others because he only got a ‘tone’ like the ones from Bruce and Thor only more varied. He did find
himself fine-tuning his understanding of her slight physical tells, though. For instance, he could now
tell the difference between her being irritated (felt like sandpaper) and annoyed (orange). She did try
to use sudden spikes of thought to distract him, which he was grateful for. If he wanted to be cleared
for active duty again he needed to be able to handle it.

Steve was the closest to ‘normal’, so his thoughts were a constant jumble. They always followed a
logical progression, but listening to the man’s thoughts was similar to listening to one of Tony’s
rambles, only internally. With practice he could ignore that, too, but gaining the practice had lead to a
much greater understanding of just how odd everything still felt for the supersoldier, even after a year
out of the ice. Much of what they thought was him actually knowing was nothing more than logical
guesses simply due to him not having the background understanding his teammates enjoyed. The
guy didn’t even understand the toaster, simply because he’d never received any basic physics in
school and didn’t know about the Law of Conservation of Energy or about electrical resistors.

He also learned that Cap was actually more than capable of swearing, in languages Clint didn’t even
know too, he just chose not to. Plus he thought about sex more than anyone would have guessed,
being more on par with him and Tony than Clint would have expected.

Still, eventually he managed to block out Cap’s rambling thoughts. That left only one to tackle.

* 

“Hey Tony. Mind if I come in?”

“No at all.” The dark-haired man said, waving him in. It was odd listening to Tony keep total track
of him, wonder over his motivations, and think about Pepper (she was not going to be happy if
(when, Clint knew how big his mouth could be) she ever discovered how much he knew about sex
with her) while still focussing an almost painful amount on the project he was working on (new
arrows for Clint. Apparently a silent apology for making him uncomfortable). “What brought you
down?” Tony asked then, drawing Clint’s attention back to the man and not his thoughts.

“Nothing, really.” He said, and caught a blue-yellow (amusement and skepticism, likely) thought of
*No one ever just comes down without wanting something*. He frowned, especially when he
catched the dark teal (pity and resignation) follow up. *They can’t see how amazing all of this is.
They just don’t get it.* And oh, Clint got it. It was the same feeling he got on the range when he’d
just released an arrow and knew it was going right where he wanted it to. He shook his head, trying
to clear it once again.

*No, no, no, don’t feel sorry for him, he’s a grown man and chose to come down here, I don’t have
to apologize for how I think, that’s private and it’s fine and it’s the only reason he’s even here to
begin with because I’d just be a corporate suit hack like Hammer if I wasn’t such a goddamn
genius…*
“Actually, I just wanted to hang out. Do you mind? I can just play on my phone over on the couch or something.” Bright, almost painful, green (disbelief) came with the *Yeah, right, and I’m the Queen of England* thought, and Clint couldn’t resist raising an eyebrow. “Much as you may think you deserve a crown, Stark,” He drawled, pleased with the amount of attention that switched to him as soon as bantering began, “I think you’d look just awful in Queen Elizabeth’s usual dresses. Plus you’d have your subjects re-enacting the French Revolution within the hour if anyone ever let you rule.”

Tony was silent for a moment, half thinking about his project and the rest of his attention split between a comeback and chasing down the fleeting thought that Clint had picked up. His thoughts this time were bright, laughing yellow, even as he sniped back, “I look amazing in everything, thank you very much, and they’d behave when I threatened to abdicate in your favour.”

Clint laughed and clapped his shoulder. “Don’t let me disturb you, I just want to get used to your thoughts so I can keep them out of my head. You won’t even know I’m here.” He promised, and Tony’s thoughts on that were yellow again. He didn’t think he’d forget the archer’s presence.

“You may as well come over here. I know all the physics of it, but you still understand arrows on a level I don’t. You can help me design some new EMP ones. Yours are too bulky.” *99% that Clint meant what he said, 40% that he’d accept the offer, 9.34% that he’ll stay a full hour…*

Clint smiled and sat on the offered chair. “Sure, but you’re going to have to explain some of your holograph technology to me. If I’m going to actually work with it, that would probably be a good idea, right?”

“Right.” Tony replied, smiling. It was his usual smug grin, but Clint could see the hope and giddiness hidden by it.

*They’d finally declared him fit for duty, and Hawkeye had never been more excited to hear about Doombots. He was adept at filtering out the others (including the Hulk. Thor was still denying he was the one that finished the last of the coffee during an important experiment) and raring to go. The only thing was, Tony didn’t think like he usually did in battle. Instead of his usual chatter, all Clint heard was a steady stream of numbers. *Widow’s Bite 83% effective. EMP arrows 94% effective. Lightning resistance, but blunt trauma still effective. Cap bash: 2/kill. Cap toss: average 3 kills per throw, throws last average 4.30 seconds. Mjolnir: 1/kill, thrown: average 2 kills per throw, throws last 5.82 seconds. Hulk smash: 0.5/kill. Repulsors: optimal power 32%, available shots 1,385 before stated 75% power loss level and warnings start. Head beam not recommended at this point, power drain to effectiveness ratio not favourable. Victory: 89% likely at current rate. Casualties on*
team: 73% for minor wounds, 7.4% major, 0.26% fatal. Civilians: not applicable. Time till end of battle: 8 min, 35 sec.* Clint missed a shot before he was able to block it out, the sheer intensity of Tony’s focus almost overwhelming. He’d thought all of that through in only seconds.

He was right, though. The battle was going overwhelmingly in their favour. Tony’s countdown was under two minutes when a new advisory appeared on the field. It was tougher than it’s friends, neither the arrows nor the Widow’s Bite being particularly effective. Thor and Cap were separated by the crowd still around, and Hulk hadn’t noticed it yet.

Tony did, and his suit informed him in an instant that the newest addition was rigged to blow.

*Size and type suggests high explosive capability, likely kill zone 10 meters. Serious injury zone 20 meters. Damage zone 47 meters. Detonation in 15 seconds. Widow escape probability 86% kill, 59% injury, damage 23%. 96% structural damage to Hawkeye’s perch. Chance of planned escape 38%, intuitive escape: 83%. Chance of death if building falls: 96% Hawkeye, 71% Widow. Chance of dismantling bomb in given time: 0.03. Chance of shield or Mjolnir being effective: 8%. Chance Hulk can contain explosion: 85%. Chance Hulk will notice in time to help: 32%. Chance of Cap noticing and ordering Hulk over: 46%. Chance of Iron Man flying explosive out of blast range in time: 95%. Chance of damage to armour: 34%. Modify, drop explosive 1 sec before detonation: Out of range: 82%. Chance of shrapnel causing serious injury to any gawking civilian: 13% Acceptable conclusion.*

*14 seconds*

Tony grabbed the robot and flew straight up just as Cap noticed it, and promptly ignored his leader’s call of “Iron Man, it’s probably explosive! Get away!”

*10 seconds*

“Iron Man! Don’t!”

*7 seconds*

“Dammit, Tony, listen for once!”

*2 seconds*
*0.8 seconds. *Tony let go, continuing to fly straight up. Clint ducked behind the fire escape. He was closest now, even though it really wasn’t that close anymore.

*0*

Boom!! Clint could feel the shockwave as a slight breeze on his skin after a moment, then stepped out and went back to taking out the regular ones.

* Tony was getting chewed out by Cap. Again. Clint hadn’t even gotten back down to ground yet, but he could both hear and hear them.

“… Reckless! You never listen to plans, always doing your own thing… What if it had blown up while you were still holding it? When you see something odd, you’re supposed to call it in, not run off to play by yourself!” *Oh God, oh God, how many times is he going to get lucky before we don’t get him back? How long before he gets himself killed by not trusting us? Oh, Tony, why won’t you let us stand with you?*

“He called out, causing both of them to look at him.

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“Uh, yeah, if you mean the whole saving lives thing, then yes. Yes, I did do that thing I do! That’s kinda the whole fucking point of the suit, you know. It’s not just ‘cause it’s sexy as hell, you know.” *Never happy. Never ever happy. No time. I was closest. I had the best chance. Out of range: 80%. Chance of damage to armour: 7.9%. Chance of shrapnel causing serious injury to any gawking civilian: 12%*

“Cool it, Cap, it’s all good.” He called out, causing both of them to look at him.

“… The hell?”

“You have something to say, Barton?”

Clint scratched at the back of his head nervously. “It actually wasn’t impulsive at all, Cap. Stark ran numbers on all sorts of scenarios and picked the one that gave us all next to no chance of injury, being 80% likely to for even me to be past where the blast will do any damage. There was only a 7.9% chance of the armour being damaged, less that he’d be hurt, and only a small chance that the idiots who stand and watch while we fight would even get banged up by falling robot guts. It wasn’t reckless. It was thought out, it was planned to the second, and it was in motion by the time you even noticed the new robot was there. If he left it, Chances are high that either Widow or I, the closest, would have been injured. Possibly even killed, as the blast would have taken out the building I was
standing on.”

Everyone was staring at him in confusion now except for Hulk. The green one was looking for twitching robots to smash.

“It’s actually really fucking terrifying just how smart Tony is, you know. He lets you lead, but I think he could do it too, if he really wanted, even though he doesn’t know combat patterns as well as most of us do. He is just that brilliant that he can run those patterns deliberately even though he doesn’t have our training to see them.” They were all still staring at him, so he just reiterated his previous point. “He wasn’t being reckless. That’s really all I have to say. Just.. He wasn’t.”

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