Red, White and Blue, Blue, Blue

by determamfidd

Summary

(or, The Origins of 'Oh My Stars and Garters')

Written for a kinkmeme prompt.

Steve draws the people he knows. He draws them over and over, trying to draw the place he fits in. He has hundreds and hundreds of sketches, and he usually gets them right.

Until the day Fury tells them that the representative from the X-Men is here, and Steve can't draw him, can't pin him down at all.

Notes

Written for Avengerkink here.

When Fury tells them that they are required to liaise with the various other super-powered folks on the planet in case of level-omega emergencies, Tony scoffs loudly.

"Oh, please, Long John," he sneers, "like any of those hosers can even come close to comparing with us. We can handle it. We’re the Earth’s Mightiest Heroes, it’s not on the merchandise for show.”

Steve sighs and rolls his eyes. “Tony, it’s tactical sense to make allies in case of that sort of threat.
We can’t be everywhere at once, and there’s only six of us.”

“He’s right,” says Bruce, looking up. Then he smiles wryly, bitterly. After all, he was the original omega-level threat.

Tony waves his science-buddy away impatiently. “Nah. We’re fine. And don’t think I can’t hear your thoughts right now, Debbie Downer.”

“How many?” Natasha asks in her even, controlled voice.

“The Fantastic Four and the X-Men, so far,” Fury replies. “We’re closing in on an identity for Daredevil and Spiderman as well.”

“Amateurs,” Tony grunts. “And Richards is a total douchebag.”

“Tony,” Steve says warningly.

“They’ve done some impressive things,” Bruce says, and fidgets with his glasses. “I think it’s a good idea.”

“What if the Chitauri had invaded Earth through many portals, not just the one? We need to keep in touch. These people could be useful, Tony,” Steve continues patiently.

Tony snorts and sinks down in a chair. Clint clears his throat.

“Besides, I hear that they’ve got people who really can read thoughts,” he says, and shrugs uncomfortably. The word ‘Loki’ is practically flashing around him in neon. “Think how useful that could be in a fight.”

Tony grunts.

Fury steamrolls ahead, as though there had never been any doubt. “Fine, I’ll set up the meetings. Richards from the F.F. has expressed interest in meeting with Banner and Stark. I’ll let you know when the representative from the X-Men arrives.”

Both Bruce and Tony share a glance and wince. “You have to talk to him,” Tony says flatly.

“Ah, I don’t think that’s conducive to keeping my blood pressure down,” Bruce mutters.

Steve sighs.

Steve didn’t know what to expect from the ambassador of the mutant vigilante group, but he’s pretty sure this wasn’t quite what he had in mind.

He’s only there for the meet-and-greet with the X-Men’s go-to. Just him, Tony and Bruce. Tony and Bruce are there because the guy is apparently a scientist as well, and Steve is there because it always looks good to put Captain America out the front. Besides, Tony on his own would start a diplomatic crisis, and Bruce wouldn’t say anything at all. So Steve’s stuck on scientist-sitting duty.

He knew the guy would be a mutant, but not so... mutated.

Hank McCoy is a supergenius. He has one of those top-tier, mind-boggling intellects along with Bruce and Tony and Reed Richards, and is the world-leading expert in biochemistry and genetics. He smiles often, and he speaks with a beautifully modulated voice. He quotes incessantly from
literature, and has a gentle, well-developed sense of humour. He is polite and unfailingly kind, and Steve can sense a profoundly humanist morality underneath the man’s every word, driving his every move.

He is also blue.

Steve knows he is staring, but the Beast is a deep, rich, royal blue all over. His ears are pointed like a cat’s, his mouth set into a feline bow. The teeth are worryingly white and sharp when he smiles. He has fur. Actual fur. It’s short, silky-looking and flat on his face, like the pelt of an Abyssinian cat, and longer at his elbows and shoulders like a Persian. The shaggy hair on his head is slightly darker, thicker, settling around his features like a bristling mane. The labcoat he wears strains to stretch over his body, shoulders broader even than Steve’s. His arms are huge and he stands as tall as Thor – when he stands at all. He mostly crouches, huddled on his haunches as though attempting to make himself look smaller. It doesn’t work.

“Captain,” he says in that beautiful voice, and inclines his magnificent (blue!!! The man is blue!) head. He has golden eyes behind preposterously tiny glasses. “It is a delight and a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Doctor Hank McCoy.”

Steve closes his mouth and shakes his hand. The fur is soft, but the hand is tipped with vicious-looking claws. McCoy obviously has a lot of experience with them, however, and they are carefully, even delicately, held away from his skin. Steve’s hands are big, but they are swallowed by the X-Man’s. If his arms are huge, then his hands and feet are gargantuan. Steve can feel the pent-up power in them, the absolute control.

He is blue. He is huge.

His fur is soft, and his voice is so human.

Steve walks after them as they move towards the helicarrier’s R & D labs. McCoy listens politely to Tony and Bruce, interjecting occasionally with what seems to be a trademark erudite humour. Apparently they have all bonded over Richards being an insufferable prick.

The three of them lead Steve into the labs, and he sits down as the babble washes over him. McCoy immediately launches into questions, and his golden eyes sparkle with life. He loves knowledge, Steve realises. He loves to learn – actually loves it, not just as a phrase trotted out by so many. He asks question after question, enthusiasm pouring from every pore. He asks about the genetic impact of Hulk on Bruce’s cells, about any side-effects from the vibranium in Tony’s arc reactor (apparently he was the one Fury contracted to create the serum that reversed Tony’s palladium poisoning) and about the Chitauri’s physiological, genetic and chemical composition.

“I was rather fascinated,” he admits, leaning over on his haunches. “It’s not every day one sees an alien invasion.”

Not every day I see a man who is blue, Steve thinks, and finds a small part of him wishing that he could shake Hank’s mammoth hand again, to touch the fur and see if it is as soft as he remembers. Velvet over steel.

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They move to the gym so that they can find out if they can work together, see each other’s paces. Steve wonders how this went with Richards. Apparently there was a tiny little Hulk-smash moment (Tony’s words).
Hank strips off the labcoat as Tony suits up, and Bruce politely declines, opting to sit this one out. “Cap’s here,” he says with a little shrug, that uncomfortable look on his face that they know so well. “You don’t need the green guy today. Besides, I’ve already tried it with Richards – and apparently Hulk isn’t a fan of people who aren’t his team. No offense, Doctor McCoy.”

McCoy smiles again, white fangs glinting. He toes off his gigantic shoes, feet nimble as a pianist’s fingers. Steve blinks. Those feet are the size of platters (and of course, blue). “None taken. The good Captain, Iron Man and I can undertake the manly arts of percussive pugilism sufficiently, no need to bring your verdigris variant to this party.”

Tony grins as the helmet closes over his head. “I like him. Verdigris variant. That’s a good one. Brucey, I’m getting alliterative on your ass from here in.”

Bruce just shakes his head and sits down in the observation room.

“So what do we need to know about working with you?” Steve asks.

Hank’s arms are bare, and the massive muscles bunch. “Have you gentlemen had the chance to peruse the file regarding my mutation and my abilities?”

“You mean it’s not just the blue and the...” Steve gestures vaguely, “the brain?”

For the first time, the doctor’s face grows hard. He looks like a lion, stern and unyielding, regal like an African statue. “My mind has nothing to do with my mutation, which is purely physical,” he says, his tone polite even though he obviously feels rather strongly about the matter. “My mind is all me, if you will.”

Tony tilts his head. “And the blue?”

Hank sighs, almost imperceptibly. “Is a long, long story. Well. To work then.”

“Hang on, we still don’t know what it is that you...” Steve says, and then his eyes are falling out of his head.

Hank is upside down, clinging to the roof with those feet. He clambers faster than thought, almost gorilla-like, over the ceiling to drop down in front of him and deliver a punch the likes of which he hasn’t felt since the Red Skull. It’s like being hit with an iron girder.

“Jesus...!” Tony says, and launches immediately. Hank crouches for a moment, and then leaps into the air after him, looking like nothing so much as a cat leaping after a butterfly. He twists (impossibly agile, impossible lithe!) as Steve pants on the floor, recovering. Tony’s leg gets caught in one gigantic blue hand. The weight immediately begins to pull the suit to the ground.


“Approximately 500 pounds. Why, am I losing my girlish figure?”

Steve hauls himself up and hefts his shield. He’s still slightly winded (what a punch!) but he’s recovering just as fast as he ever does. The shield whips out at the blue-furred arm clutching Tony’s leg, and the hand jerks open in surprise. Beast falls to the floor.


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Steve is half-expecting him to crash, but apparently the cat-like similarities are more than cosmetic. He lands on all fours, palms spread widely against the floor, and immediately leaps to rebound from the walls, legs threading through his outstretched arms. Dear god, he’s agile, maybe more agile even than Natasha. Before Steve can follow the movements, he is being met with a pair of gigantic blue
feet to the face. He ducks with a cry and strikes upwards with all his strength.

Hitting Beast’s solar plexus is like hitting concrete.

Hank staggers slightly at the blow - being hit by Captain America is no joke - but recovers beautifully, ducking around the shield that shears towards his face, and rolling, before springing into the air again. He leaps back (there was some sort of double-flip in there, and Steve tries not to gawk) to cling against the wall once more and then Tony is hovering there, his hands open and the repulsors trained on their blue ally. “Not bad, surfaceman,” he says, and there is grudging admiration in his electronic voice.

Hank grins, all white fangs, as he drops to his haunches and digs into a pocket at his side. “Oh, I’m barely warming up,” he says lightly, and presses down on something.

Tony’s suit drops like a rock, and Steve can hear him swearing.

“Targeted EMP,” Hank says, pocketing it again. “I always carry a small arsenal of gadgets. You never know when a Sentinel is going to interrupt the festivities, after all. Oh relax, it’s not going to affect the arc reactor. It’ll wear off in two to three minutes. Stop struggling. Your armour is too heavy for an unaltered man to carry without mechanical assistance, and you’ll do yourself quite the mischief.”

“Bloody... housepet... fucking.... bastard did to my suit...” Tony splutters. The suit rocks slightly from side to side, a turtle stranded on its back.

Steve’s breath is coming a little fast, but he eyes the blue man with a smile. “I think this is going to work,” he says.

Hank smiles back, and his golden eyes are warm. “Indubitably.”

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He’s always over at the Tower.

Steve sighs and flips over a page in his sketchbook. Hank is working with Bruce on something, and the man is always over to peer at a screen, clinging casually from the ceiling. His hair and fur sighs and sags against gravity as the busy eyes race over incomprehensible data – upside down.

Steve draws the people he knows. He draws them over and over, trying to draw the place he fits in. He’s drawn Natasha fighting, Natasha injured, Natasha as she sips at her tea. He has sketches of Thor as he laughs uproariously at the television, and of Fury as he rubs tiredly at his forehead. He’s sketched Clint with his eyes full of mischief and Clint asleep, looking far older than he does awake. He has hundreds of pictures of Bruce in stages of rumpled to very rumpled, and several of Hulk in a rare post-smashing calm. There’s Tony drunk, Tony hungover, Tony suited-up and Tony up to his elbows in black grease and engine parts.

He can’t capture Hank.

Hank looks so fierce, but at the heart of him he is so very, very human. He’s a gentle man, really. Every attempt to capture him, the amused curl of his lip, the so-careful movements of those gargantuan hands... it always comes out wrong. Steve’s pictures only manage to record the external image of Hank, that hugeness and leonine ferocity, and not the vastly moral, erudite, intelligent, funny and civilised man beneath it.

He’s tried several times to pin down the glint in those golden eyes, but it completely eludes him.
Finally he throws down his pencil and strides away from his sketches. He’ll try again later.

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There’s a battle, and Hank is there.
There’s a dinner, and Hank is there.
There’s a funeral, and Hank is there.
There’s a conference, and Hank is there.
There’s a wedding, and Hank is there.
There’s an argument, and Hank is there.
There’s a party, and Hank is there.
There’s a speech, and Hank is there.
There’s a protest, and Hank is there.
There’s a lab, and Hank is there.

Gentle and yet ferocious, brilliant and yet bestial, wise and yet feral, a beast and yet so very human... his mouth full of smiles and quotes, his mind busy and compassionate, his claws so controlled, so delicate. It seems every time Steve turns around, Hank is always, always there.

~**~

Steve gets his chance maybe eight months after their first meeting.

The Avengers have come to Westchester to visit and to debrief after the battle against the latest omega-level. Hank was wounded. Steve begs off early on in the meeting, claiming that he should really go and visit his injured friend and Wolverine smirks at Steve knowingly.

He met the clawed mutant, along with his maniacal brother, during the war. He’s sort of glad that another piece of his past has survived to the present day, but he’s torn between being sad that Logan can’t remember and annoyed at the Canuck’s smirking face. Damned superior senses.

He finds Hank in the small room off his cluttered, cosy lab. He’s curled up, catlike and asleep, on the couch. There’s a bandage around his side.

The click of the door rouses him a little, and Steve freezes. Hank groans as he stretches out. His massive hands uncurl. Then he rolls over onto his stomach, his gigantic arms flopping forward. The clawed tips of his fingers brush the carpeted floor, and the couch springs creak under his weight.

It seems sort of weird to be watching Hank right now, so Steve peers around at the room instead as he waits for him to wake. There are pictures of people on the walls, and he recognises Iceman and Cyclops easily. They are barely more than children in one photo - Jean Grey’s hair longer, Angel and another man, broad and open-faced, grinning from behind her. Jubilee, Hank in all his blue glory, and Shadowcat are pulling faces at the camera (Hank’s is particularly gruesome) in another. Hank is in an academic gown, proudly clutching a scroll in one giant blue hand – and that picture was obviously not taken in a university but in the library of the mansion. There is another photo, old, with that sunny, grainy Seventies quality, of a couple in front of a large house with a barn in the background. A little boy is grinning at the camera from within the man’s arms.
Steve frowns.

The little boy in the picture is obviously the same person as the open-faced young man in the photo of the young X-Men. He peers at it, and then stops.

He has drawn that jawline. Tried to capture it a thousand times.

This is Hank.

The young man is grinning Hank’s grin, and Steve marvels that he couldn’t see it before. The eyes are brown, but no less full of intelligence and warm humour. The hands, pale and pink, were still enormous. Steve traces the lines with his eyes and sees Hank’s chin, Hank’s brow, Hank’s cheekbones. He takes in the wavy brown hair on the young man’s head, which reminds him a little of Bucky’s. He’s seen the same wave in Hank’s current shaggy blue mane.

But this young man, though stocky, had nowhere near Hank’s sheer hugeness, and obviously he wasn’t blue-furred and clawed.

“Ah, memories,” Hank rasps ironically from behind him.

“What happened?” Steve asks quietly.

Hank is silent for a while. Then he sighs, air escaping those huge lungs like a bellows. “I decided to meddle with that which I had been gifted,” he says. “I played God. God obviously has opinions about that sort of thing.”

Steve looked back at the grinning young man in the photo. It is Hank’s grin. Sure, there’re no fangs, and the mouth is an entirely different shape. But the cheerful, warm, almost joyous expression – that’s exactly the same.

“You don’t look all that different to me,” Steve says.

Hank snorts, and then muffles a groan as it pulls at his injuries. “Well. I am of the firm opinion that it is a crying shame the world is not full of Captain Americas.”

“Stop that,” Steve says, and turns to give him a scowl. “Really. Hank, you’re...”

Hank leans up on one shaggy elbow, props his head up on his platter-sized hand. “Blue?” he suggests. “On the slightly-hirsute side? A hit with middle-aged divorcees with cat fetishes?”

There is an unaccustomed note of cynicism in Hank’s smooth, resonant voice, and Steve finds that he doesn’t like it. “No,” he snaps, and then rubs his face resignedly. “Well, yes. I don’t know about the divorcees. But Hank--”

Hank snorts again, and then winces, placing his other hand against his injured side. “Steve, I did this to myself, I have only myself to blame. I used to be able to pass, and now I cannot. I’m still me, of course... I still have my mind, comfort that it is, but I can never again appear to be the human being that I am. I will always be seen, first and foremost, as the Beast.”

“No,” Steve barks. “Jeez Louise! No, that is not how I see you!”

“Again,” Hank inclines his head politely, ironically, “I doubly despair that the world is not populated entirely by Captain Americas.”

“I wish I could show you,” Steve fumes, and then he slumps into the chair opposite his friend.
Hank smiles again. “If you could convince me, you could convince anyone.”

Steve clenches his fists. “Lie back down, you’ll open that side of yours.”

“Fast healer,” Hank says noncommittally, but lies back down anyway. The couch groans loudly. “Not as fast as you, you showoff, but definitely on the speedier side.”

“No reason to make it worse,” Steve growls. He’s in a terrible mood now. Hank, the most human man he knows, is convinced no one can see him behind the blue fur.

“Really, Steve,” Hank says, gentler now. “It’s all right. I’m used to it now, and it did come with some unexpected benefits. I’m far, far stronger than I was, my senses are better, and I’m faster and heal much more quickly. I very rarely get cold, and my dexterity is even greater in my gross motor movements than before. I have a built-in knife and fork, if required. And I can get away with wearing fur in this day and age without PETA’s disapproval! What other public figure can say that?”

Hank is trying to cheer him up. It’s almost unbearable.

“That’s enough,” he says flatly. “I’m going to show you.”

Hank gestures with one hand: Be my guest.

Steve grabs at Hank’s cluttered desk, pulls some paper over and blindly swipes a pen from the cup. He fixes Hank with a determined look, taking in the way he is lying – on his side, the couch groaning, his fur ruffled in all directions, his head pillowed on his arm. The pen skitters across the paper.

“Steve, there’s no need,” Hank begins.

“Shut up,” Steve growls. “I’m busy.”

He’s going to get this right. He’s going to get it right this time. Hank’s face is a human face, his fur is human fur, his hands, his claws, his fangs – they are all Hank’s and they are all human and he is going to show him that or burst.

He darts his eyes up at Hank every now and again, and takes in the wryly amused look on his face, the way his lip quirks to reveal half a fang. His shoulders are huge, yes, and furred – but the way they slump, heavy with pain, that’s how everyone feels, how all people feel... and his mouth is bowed like a cat’s, but the lines that surround it are those of the young man in the photo. There are crinkled laugh lines around the golden eyes, and a thickly furrowed line of sorrow between his brows.

Steve sketches furiously, and Hank waits patiently, not expecting anything. The silence is absolute but for the scratching of Steve’s pen.

Hank’s elbow is pointing towards him, and Steve spends time shading the hollows and rounds of bone he can see beneath the fur. The bandages around his side are barely a suggestion, just a few lines. His side is a steep slope from huge shoulders to hips, his knees twisted together under a tartan blanket.

There is a full-body cowlick along Hank’s stomach, and he draws it in with quick smooth strokes of the pen. For some reason Steve didn’t think that the skin beneath the fur would be pink and pale – but it is. He can see it in the parting of the blue hairs, white and vivid against the royal blue, the faintest suggestion of a shadow where those concrete abdominals ridge and buckle. He wonders if that pale, pale skin, hidden from eyes and the sun for so long, is even softer than the blue fur.
He traces over the heavy slabs of muscle that are Hank’s legs, the striped pyjama pants, the blanket over his knees. His feet, deadly and clever and massive, are tucked against the couch’s armrest, and slightly pigeon-toed, awkward and natural, just as everyone’s feet settle when lying on their side.

His throat is thick and strong, and Steve concentrates on getting the flared collarbone right. It’s curved in on itself as Hank slumps onto his arm, but the pride and strength in it is not so easily hidden. It’s beautiful, that curve, that line. Hank is all strong, beautiful lines, weary and soft with intelligence.

His ears are flattened with pain, almost buried in his mane. Steve likes Hank’s ears – likes how immensely expressive they are. He spends time tracing their upswept curve, the raven’s-wing-dip of them against his head. Hank’s wild hair is dishevelled, and could really do with a brush. It’s tangled and in his eyes.

He sits back.

“Finished drawing me like one of your French girls?” asks Hank lightly.

Steve doesn’t get that reference. He looks down at the picture, and then at his friend who is returning the look, golden eyes steady. “Um.” The picture... isn’t the same as the others. He’s captured Hank, he thinks. Something about Hank. The laugh lines, the humour, the warmth of him. “I think so.”

Hank pushes himself up a little, and then hisses as his side protests. “Ow.”

“Lie down, you idiot,” Steve scolds, and stands to push him down again.

“That’s not something I am accused of very...” Hank stops.

Steve looks down, follows his eyes. The picture is still in his hand.

“May I?” Hank says, and his deep, beautiful voice is so very, very carefully modulated that Steve suspects he is stopping it from trembling. He hands over the picture.

Hank gazes at it for a moment, and then slumps back onto the couch again with an indefinable noise – half gasp, half growl. His eyes are glued to the portrait. He doesn’t move, just keeps staring.

“I’m sorry,” Steve begins, feeling wretched. “Hank, I was only...”

“Steve,” he rumbles.

Steve looks back up.

Hank is smiling like a sunrise. “Thank you.”

Steve’s heart skips once, and then he smiles back. “You’re welcome.”

Hank looks back at the drawing, and sighs almost happily. “It’s rather a trial to be such a handsome brute,” he says, and there it is, back once more, that warm humour that underlies everything about Hank.

Steve’s smile turns to a grin, and he puts a hand on Hank’s shoulder. The fur is so soft, the muscles harder than iron. Between them is a layer of human skin. “Oh, I’m sure it is,” he says seriously. “I’m sure it is.”

~ * ~
The next time Steve visits Westchester, Hank has a new picture in his little office.
He also has a new catchphrase, coined in the hopes of making Steve blush.
FIN

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