Invasions and Ice Cream

by Thrashing_Light

Summary

Loki had an invasion to prevent and two worlds to convince. Which is why he enlisted the help of an old friend of his, a certain stoic Demon Lord.

Thanos and his Armada will come, and Loki and Sesshomaru will fight them. They just will also partake in some ice cream, pop culture, and two enticing Avengers along the way.

Maybe, just maybe, they all will survive.

AU Xover, set after the first Avengers movie, before the second Thor movie. Sesshomaru/Tony Stark, Loki/Clint Barton. (IronLord, Frosthawk)
Sesshomaru and the Bifrost

Chapter Notes

I do not own any of the characters, they are the property of rumiko takahashi and Marvel Comics :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Sesshomaru and the Bifrost.

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Sesshomaru allowed himself to enjoy the welcoming breeze cresting over the hill in the heart of the Western Lands. His expression serene. If not bored, taking in the rolling expanse of budding land.

Spring had arrived, finally. New beginnings.

Sesshomaru, however placid he seemed, had thoughts colliding in his head. Should he rebuild his father's empire to its full and former glory? Maybe even surpass it to reclaim some of the Eastern lands owned by the Tiger demons? Or...

"Lord Sesshomaru I caught three fish, one for me, one for Ah and one for Un!" He turned his head and regarded Rin mildly. A ghost of a smile graced his eyes as he watched Jaken and Rin, soaked with river water, fighting over fish.

"You stupid human girl! Watch as I catch twice as many! Three for me and three for Lord Sesshomaru!" Jaken exclaimed, flailing about with his makeshift spear in the river bed.

"You'll just get fat Jaken!" Rin stuck her tongue out and then he felt it. A tremendous energy surged...from the sky?

Tenseiga pulsed.

"Rin, Jaken." Sesshomaru almost barked out and they froze as a slightly familiar light shown down much brighter than the sun. Sesshomaru barely had time to leap and embrace Rin and Jaken before all went white.

Sesshomaru's body warped oddly, like his muscles were being twisted, and his mind split, thoughts fragmenting. His eyes bled red, but Tenseiga's throbbing pulse kept him mentally grounded. He couldn't tell if he could hear Rin's screams or the scream of the wind.

And as quickly as it came, it was gone. He tingle of magic left his body, he resisted the urge to shake it off like a dog would. His gold eyes regarded Rin and Jaken instantly as not physically injured, but magic could harm you in ways not immediately discernible.

"Rin, Jaken are you hurt?" Sesshomaru checked over them once more. He smelled no blood, just
the spicy tang of a foreign magic.

"No Lord Sesshomaru. Rin is fine!" She bounced up and looked around the same time Jaken came to. Sesshomaru relaxed, nostrils flaring for any familiar scent but finding none.

"Lord Sesshomaru what happened?! Where are we?!!" Jaken exclaimed and for good reason.

Sesshomaru took a youki scan of the area after finding no familiar scents. Other than Jaken and Rin. There no youki, nor familiar scent traces anywhere. Strange. Sesshomaru immediately heightened all his senses. He didn't like this situation in the least.

They were in a barren wasteland. Everything around them was deep blue sky and red brown dirt with small scrubby bushes.

"Silence Jaken." Sesshomaru put out his left hand as if to tell them to stay back. Tenseiga still hummed by his side.

"What are you trying to tell me Tenseiga?" Sesshomaru closed his eyes and this time pulsed out his youki as far as he could in all directions. His ice blue youki burst out like a dome. He knew he would be able to scan something with this method.

Pause.

Except he felt nothing, except a small human ping East South East of his current location. He knew he distantly felt this specific spicy tang of magic before, Sesshomaru began to search his memory. It definitely wasn't Naraku or anything nefarious. Yet, what was this trick? Why did it bring him here?

"I sense humans this way, let us make haste." Sesshomaru directed and turned towards the desired direction, cursing himself for not recalling why this magic felt so similar.

"Lord Sesshomaru, this magic! Who could so something like this?! The Lord of the Northern Lands used to employ such devious sorcerers!" Jaken cursed, picking up the pace with the staff of two heads. Not even Jaken knew what it was, which too was unusual since Jaken was very well schooled in such matters.

"Magic! Magic exists Lord Sesshomaru?! Is it good magic?!!" Rin skipped, toying with her wet kimono. Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes and regarded both of his wards. He had to protect his pack, but at the same time reassure them that he knew exactly what had transpired.

When in actuality, he had no idea what had happened. It secretly infuriated the usually emotionless Demon Lord.

"Yes Rin, magic exists. I doubt this is the doing of the Lord of the Northern lands, he would have attacked by now." Sesshomaru calculated this magic was not one he felt for a while. Most likely it was not of nearby lands. Perhaps the Lands across the Great Sea lured him into a trap? They were supposed to be his allies, but he had not communicated with them since before Naraku.

As they walked tirelessly for hours, the sun became to be overbearing, Sesshomaru could see Rin start to fatigue.

"Jaken, produce water." He ordered softly and the lesser used head on the staff of heads poured out water that Rin excitedly cupped in her hands and drank.

"Thank you Lord Sesshomaru, this new world is very hot!" Rin chirped in between gulps and
suddenly it came to him, right as they approached the human town. All the while Tenseiga still hummed contentedly. Sesshomaru nodded softly.

New worlds. Other realms. The magic.

He knew it from the first time his father took him to the coast to study with other Royalty of different realms. He was only one hundred years old at the time. He hadn't dealt with anyone from the distant realms for five decades. It was all before Tessaiga. He gave it all up after his last encounter with a particular God.

"Jaken do you-" Sesshomaru stopped himself, he sensed something coming in fast, something aerial, something not Demonic.

He whipped around, ears perking up at a small red dot rapidly approaching, it smelled awful, like soot, fire and metal.

"Jaken protect Rin." Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles, producing his deadly toxin, and began to walk calmly towards the approaching threat. Tenseiga hummed stronger than before. Jaken pulled Rin behind a large, jagged boulder.

It was then smelled the hidden scent of grime, sweat, and human coming from the approaching entity. Sesshomaru's eyes widened a fraction as he realized a human was flying towards him in metal armor.

'What land is this? I must be on guard. It is possible I have been lured to a different realm I must not reveal any of my powers than what I must.' Sesshomaru's expression soured. He had been to different realms before and knew of their acute and formidable dangers. If need be, he could gather Rin and Jaken and fly in his white ball form and possibly outrun the threat. But Sesshomaru never ran, of course.

He watched with no sign of curiosity as the red and gold metal man slowed and landed around eighty feet from him.

"Hey Reindeer Games, love the new look, going for drag-queen samurai chic? Or are you actually a woman now?" The armored man asked Sesshomaru with barely hidden malice. Sesshomaru had no idea what this lunatic human was asking him. He wasn't speaking the human tongue of his lands, that was certain.

"This Sesshomaru is no woman." Sesshomaru replied mildly, clearly the heat had roasted this man's brain if he thought him a woman. He did not look that feminine. He could sense that the entity was a human. However, he could sense immense energy coming from the armored suit. Perhaps more magic. Sesshomaru's ears lowered.

Tenseiga pulsed once.

It was then his youki alerted him a second incoming presence, coming from the same direction. He could easily hear it was something bigger, it smelled similar to the man in front of him.

"I could see why you'd want a disguise but the face tattoos are a little much. I got reinforcements, you can either come quietly or put up a fight but we got the green rage monster." The armored man quipped and Sesshomaru for the most part ignored what he had to say. He was quite certain that Bakusaiga could handle any foe. however, if she was compromised due to the magic, she could act recklessly and harm Rin and Jaken.

"This Sesshomaru does as he pleases." Sesshomaru exercised as much patience as he could muster.
He couldn't afford to attack without knowing exactly what he was up against. From what he knew about magic even humans could be powerful, even more powerful than priestesses. He had to wait for the opportune moment.

He saw the metal bird approach and land with a whoosh of sand. Immediately the bird opened its tail and four people scrambled out, a woman with outrageous red hair, a man in blue bedclothes and mask, an archer, and a human who did not seem all human.

They all smelled strange, dirty and salty. The man in blue bedclothes approached with a shield.

"Okay I know you can shape-shift, but you missed Burning Man." The woman smirked and the archer scowled, knocking back an arrow. Sesshomaru noted none of the humans had purification powers. That was to his advantage. He cracked his knuckles, anticipating a battle.

'Burning man? What trickery is this?' Sesshomaru examined each one, they all seemed strong in aura for humans.

"Yeah, that's what I said. I mean only someone on molly would wear a fur boa in the desert." The armored man retorted and landed next to his reinforcements, well within range of his toxin whip.

Tenseiga pulsed again.

"We have come to return you to your cell, stand down and come with us." The man in blue bedclothes announced. He must be their leader. The armored man must be the sentry. Sesshomaru could smell nervous energy coming off all the humans, even the odd one in the back underneath layers of rage.

"Let me put one in him. C'mon." Sesshomaru heard the muttering of the archer though he could tell no one else could. The archer was long range support, the woman perhaps a huntress? His eyes narrowed, their small squadron was effectively balanced.

"Lord Sesshomaru! They look so funny! Are they your friends?!" Sesshomaru's head snapped back, Rin had popped out of her hiding place.

"Hold your fire, there is a child. She is speaking Japanese." Sesshomaru darted his eyes to the huntress with red hair who spoke and the tension increased. He itched to reach for Bakusaiga but Tenseiga's pulsing commanded him no.

'Defiant, treacherous blade! No matter, I do not need Bakusaiga to kill five humans.' Sesshomaru shifted his weight to the balls of his feet.

"They are not friends Rin. Remain with Jaken." Sesshomaru commanded and he approached the five humans with a fluid poise. The unsettling aura of the human in the back began to churn.

"Yes Lord Sesshomaru! Go get em!" Rin punched a small fist in the air. He saw the huntress looked confused.

"Resorting to taking human hostages trickster? That's low even for you." The strange human in the back of the pack sneered. Could he be some sort of warlock?

'Who are these nuisance humans? They clearly believe I am some sort of shape-shifter. They clearly sought me out, and if they believe me to be someone else then this is not this Sesshomaru's problem. I will wait for them to explain themselves.' Sesshomaru's claws lengthened and his signature green toxin pooled in his nail beds.
"Guys, I'm a little confused, doesn't he usually go into some sort of manic, dramatic monologue by now? And why does he look so damn bored?" The man in armor yapped to his allies. Sesshomaru continued forward at a leisurely but steady pace, decreasing the distance to seventy feet. All the while the humans tensed up further.

"Take one more step liesmith and we will put you in the ground." The man in the blue bed clothes raised his shield. Most likely a weapon similar to the boomerang used by Inuyasha's human companion, Sango.

"Wishing for such a sudden death from this Sesshomaru is foolhardy and without pride." Sesshomaru's tone was even and calm, like still water. Sesshomaru, in a show of dominance, unfurled his, until then, hidden youki into a pulsing shockwave, warning his foe.

They all stumbled back. Sesshomaru almost smirked at their reaction. Clearly they had not expected him to be so strong of a Demon. He flexed his fingers, talons overflowed with green toxin down his milky white hand.

"Sesshomawhat?! That's it I'm-" the armored man shouted and Sesshomaru barely heard a second voice coming from the armored man, sounding almost like Totosai, but couldn't make out the words.

Sesshomaru tilted his head to the left just in time for a miraculously placed arrow to glide safely by his right temple.

'Talented archer, even by a demon's standards.' Sesshomaru leapt in the air high and drew long his claws to cut down their leader, ignoring the pleas of Tenseiga.

His toxic claws met the shield and the human parried successfully, his claws made a terrible screech against the shield. His toxin had no effect on the metal. Tenseiga pulsed, chastising him, as if saying 'I told you so.'

'Tenseiga wants the humans alive. Cursed sword indeed.' Sesshomaru's lips tilted into a slight frown. 'Perhaps Tenseiga thinks I need them to return to my lands. Hmph. This Sesshomaru needs no one's aid.' He dodged a strong swing of the leader's shield and knocked it down to the ground with a punch of his hand. The metal was indeed strong, stronger than any normal metal.

A demon with a skill of totosai must have forged this weapon for him.

"Interesting." Sesshomaru dashed to the right, to intercept the flying armored man when he heard a deafening roar.

He flipped back, the human in the back began to convert into his true form.

"We need containment at our coordinates. The other guy has control." The huntress spoke to no one Sesshomaru could see.

'This human has a true form.' Sesshomaru's pupils shrunk to paper thin slits but regained control quickly. He could smell and feel the lack of control wafting off of the entity who was currently transforming into a massive, ugly green beast. Sesshomaru had never seen a beast like this before, not even when he traveled off planet to the distant realms.

Sesshomaru monitored the other humans, an emotion similar to dread spiked high in their scents. Did they fear the outbursts of this particular human? The ogre flexed his muscles, roared and charged with reckless abandon towards his location.
'So, they these classless humans think brute strength can defeat this Sesshomaru?' Sesshomaru scoffed to himself and readied his talons only to see the Berserker veer off course to the left, attentions drawn to the armored man.

"Christ, shit, fuck! Guys hold u-" The green berserker slammed the armored man, his own comrade, with a powerful backhand into the ground. It sent him bouncing until his unmoving form lay vulnerable and prone in the sand. Sesshomaru's ears shot up.

"Tony! Hold on!" The leader wearing bedclothes went to run after the armored 'Tony' but was cut off by the rampaging berserker shoving him roughly aside, shield flying high into the air and landing well beyond the leader's grasp.

Sesshomaru planted his feet, he had enough of these charades. Such folly for his opponents to keep an untrained berserker in their midst they could not control. Humans had no real concept of power.

'Such an undisciplined true form, I can feel the uncontrolled rage radiate off him like a curse. He needs to be disciplined. I cannot get answers if this green beast kills my quarry.' Sesshomaru gathered his immense youki around him like a perfect blue, translucent sphere.

"Yield beast. Neither your rage nor your strength impress this Lord Sesshomaru." Sesshomaru's voice sounded like silk as his youki surged forth and hit the green beast dead on.

It stopped dead in its tracks, looking around at its surroundings as if for the first time. Sesshomaru allowed himself a small frown of disapproval.

"Bruce! Negative on containment!" Shouted the woman. Who exactly was she speaking to?!

"That's new." Interjected the archer.

"Wow. Ok," the armored man began to stagger from his small crater. "You are definitely not Loki. Unless you get Dog Whisperer reruns in prison? Steve Erwin?" The armored man laughed but he didn't sound happy. He managed to get his armor back in the air with some difficulty and Sesshomaru's eyes went wide for a moment.

'Loki? Since when did Loki fraternize with humans? And why would he want to associate with these incompetent fools? They even think this Sesshomaru is Loki? Why would they assume such an absurdity? Their instincts should clearly tell them I am a Demon, and most certainly not an Aesir. The magic...of course! Their magic gate I have used it once before with Father! Yet, this magic was certainly different, more powerful. Only Loki would be behind such a trick. It has been too long since I have seen that God. This offense runs deep, how dare he bring me to this awful realm.' Sesshomaru's chest rumbled in a suppressed growl.

Tenseiga hummed.

"Pitiful humans, always reliant on the senses most easily fooled. Tell me, stinking man of armor, how do you know Loki?" Sesshomaru's patience had reached its limit. He noted the archer and the woman warrior were tending to the blue bed-clothed leader and the now calmed berserker. Their aggression remained heightened, but now he had shown them of what he was capable and they smelled wary. The armored man hovered a good twenty above him.

'The armored man must like looking down on people.' Sesshomaru clenched his right fist, allowing it to glow green.

"See, I don't do well with orders, and just because you aren't Loki doesn't mean I tru-" Sesshomaru summoned his whip of toxin and arched his body and ensnared the ankle of the flying man,
plucking him from the sky and flinging him into the archer. They crashed and tumbled with a surprise shout and groan. That took care of the long range support and the sentry now for the-

Pop. Pop. Pop.

Sesshomaru's ears cried from the loud sound.

Sesshomaru fought stinging, biting pains in his chest and looked down to see three holes in his armor. He glanced up to see the woman holding a small black metal object. It smelled of explosives. What sort of weapon does she possess?! He lifted his chin back up at the woman, cocking his head to the side ever so slightly and she remained resolute in her stance, despite her brow slightly creasing in suspicion.

"I don't know who you are but the next shot is in that pretty blue moon of yours if you move an inch." Sesshomaru heard the woman, and smelled his own blood, he could tell two of the three wounds would heal fine, the one in his lung would not.

'Too fast to be arrows, too large to be darts. This pain is bothersome. And I'll have to wash this now. That weapon is clearly an improvement in what the clumsy humans have where I reside.' Sesshomaru mused to himself, poking a finger into the new hole in his armor, removing it, then used his youki to repair the chest-piece.

"He just took three bullets center mass and is standing there looking like he wants to order a pizza." The archer grimaced as he stood. Pizza? What is a pizza and what does one order a pizza to do?

It was in that instance Sesshomaru smelled a familiar scent on the wind that blew all the other putrid smells out of the air. It wasn't Kagura, but it was someone else who he had not encountered in quite a long time.

Tenseiga pulsed once more.

With a crack of lightning and a crash, earth erupted in between the huntress woman and Sesshomaru gracefully jumped back, studying the familiar aura.

'We meet again, Thor, older brother to Loki. At least he may be helpful.' Sesshomaru placed his neutral facial expression on. In the past, he was never particularly pleased to deal with Thor outside of their challenges. He was a formidable opponent and Sesshomaru was at a slight disadvantage not knowing where he was currently.

Sesshomaru readied himself, if Thor wanted to fight him, he would most certainly use Bakusaiga, regardless of Tenseiga's warnings.

"Cease your fighting friends! He is no foe of ours!" Thor stood regally, if not out of breath, his golden hair tumbled loose. Sesshomaru eyed the reactions of Storm Gods' friends. They looked at each other, disbelieving, as they should. Sesshomaru hid the slight relief the Storm God did not wish to engage in battle with him.

"Not a foe?! His dominatrix whip corroded through my suit and almost my leg!" Sesshomaru spared a slightly amused glance to the armored man, lifting up the helmet on his mask revealing a dark beard and eyes. He purposefully weakened the potency of his toxin, or it most certainly would have cleaved off his leg.

"He is an old friend of mine! This is Sesshomaru, Son of Taisho, a mighty Lord of Demons!" Thor announced and Sesshomaru quirked a silver eyebrow.
'Friend? Our fathers squabbled like maidens watching us spar against each other in those farces of a tournaments. Who would win? Strength or technique? God or Demon? Such meaningless wagers.' Sesshomaru recalled they went around even towards the end. He and Thor being considered 'friends' was a stretch of any imagination. He wasn't about to argue the point however.

"You have far poorer tastes in... friends than when we last sparred, Storm God." Sesshomaru replied, realizing whatever had pierced his armor would have to be removed from his body quickly. The projectile had begun to grate against the delicate vessels of his lung.

"Son of Taisho they know not of who you are or why you are here, and if I am to be truthful, I know not as well." Thor smiled brightly. Sesshomaru was immediately reminded of Rin, innocent and earnest. Sesshomaru could assess that Thor was indeed ignorant of who, or why he was summoned here. Sesshomaru regretted the hope that the Storm God could be of any assistance, he typically wasn't.

"Son of Taisho you are wounded!" Thor, alarmed, straightened his spine seeing the blood that had seeped into the silk of his yukata.

"Indeed." Sesshomaru slowly replied, glancing towards the woman. Thor looked back to the woman who sternly crossed her arms.

"Demon Lord...dressed as a geisha. Perfect. Great. Just what we expected! Now what?" The archer sighed and Sesshomaru decided to leave the explaining to Thor. Sesshomaru explained himself to no one.

"Storm God, summon your brother to me. I demand his presence." Sesshomaru kept his tone even and dull as he used his youki to heal two of the three wounds in his chest. If Thor had no idea what has transpired, then Loki would.

'Thrice damned woman, I'll challenge her later after I see to Loki.' Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles.

"Aye, Son of Taisho, Loki cannot come to Midgard, he is currently imprisoned in Asgard as penance for his crimes against Midgard." Thor responded, heart heavy. Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes and jutted his head back in disbelief. His pointed, pale ears shot up. Crimes on Earth? Didn't Loki profess that he was in another distant realm the last time he saw him? What mischief had Loki created since he had seen him last?

There were too many questions bubbling in Sesshomaru's mind, he cracked his knuckles.

"Do not waste my time Storm God. There is neither cage nor snare that could keep Loki if he wished for freedom. He will heed my order." Sesshomaru's deep voice cooled. Sesshomaru greatly preferred the Mischief God to the one of Storms, however this ruse had gone too far.

"Yeeeaah, no. We are no allowing a trickster God who tried to invade Earth with the blue man group elope with a Demon Lord with a BDSM fetish." The armored man smirked and his dark eyes caught Sesshomaru's gold ones.

'Loki, invade Earth? Who are these fools? To what end? For what bullion? Loki never expressed any interest in sovereignty of this world and promised me such. Surely with his prodigal strategic mind if he wanted a realm, he could easily keep it. Unless, of course I had a say.' Sesshomaru's mind wheeled through different scenarios. He surmised that these imbecilic humans must be mistaken, as they had been so far in dealing with him, and thinking him Loki.
"As if your abilities could stop me human, or an invasion of Loki's design. However unlikely his
deigns on this world may be, if Loki truly coveted this world, he would have possessed it."
Sesshomaru turned to walk back towards Rin and Jaken. Any information gleaned from these
humans would be detrimental to his return home. He would seek out a fellow Demon to assist in
his transport back home.

'Useless humans, irksome Gods.' Sesshomaru clenched his finely pointed jaw.

"Son of Taisho, you think that true?" Sesshomaru turned to Thor who looked almost fragile in his
vulnerability. Sesshomaru recalled he had always been protective of his brother, however short-
sighted he could be. His golden aura radiated with a flicker of hope.

"Storm God, do you truly need me to expound on your brother's intelligence, skill and desires to
you and your foul smelling human friends?" Sesshomaru raised an elegant eyebrow, and all eyes
shifted back to Thor. Sesshomaru suppressed a grimace, the object in his lung began to rupture his
lung.

"Hey, I smell just fine thank you!" The archer called out. Sesshomaru resisted slicing Thor's friend
in two with his whip.

'Thor was never one to thoroughly examine anything, he took everything at as presented to him. A
costly price for a jovial personality.' Sesshomaru noted, taking in all of the humans around him
with a well-practiced disinterest.

"My brother has undergone changes in his temperament as of late. He is no longer who I thought
he was; who you may think he is. He tried to usurp Asgard's throne during my coronation as well!"
Sesshomaru fought the urge to ludicrously roll his eyes. 'Thor, ready for a throne? Laughable. He
acts almost like a certain hanyou I know.' Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles thinking of Inuyasha.

"I am not some gossiping maid on whom you can vindicate your own sentiments." Sesshomaru
paused. This nonsense had gone on long enough for him. He still hadn't sensed any Demons nearby
and he now wanted to get to the bottom of this peculiar situation.

'Loki will answer for his chaos has gotten himself, and I embroiled into.' Sesshomaru's eyes
hardened into crystals and his ice blue youki spiked high.

"Loki, Mischief God of the distant realm, you will have council with this Sesshomaru, Lord of the
Western Lands this nightfall. This is no request; this is a summons!" Sesshomaru's voice sounded
like a velvet covered knife as he pointed his finger into the air and his youki rocketed up into the
sky and beyond.

'He will come or I will flay him.' Sesshomaru turned again from the mismatched group of humans
to his own companions.

"Sesshomaru," a rough voice coming from the blue clothed man. Sesshomaru did not turn around.
"Can you really make Loki appear?" His voice sounded hesitant and he could also smell confusion
and fear waft from the group.

'Do they fear me, fear Loki, or both? It'd be wise if they feared both of us though I doubt they have
the sense.' Sesshomaru tossed his long, silken hair back.

"He will come." Sesshomaru motioned for Rin and Jaken to come from behind the rock.

"Lord Sesshomaru Rin is not well!" Sesshomaru in less than a blink he was at her side. He smelled
no blood, which meant no sign of a betrayal from Storm God's friends. However she was not
conscious. She did not adapt well to the heat and sun. Under Sesshomaru's attentive hand, she felt clammy and her breathing was heavy. Sesshomaru growled lowly, he let these pitiful humans distract him from what mattered.

He gingerly picked up Rin in his arms and motioned for Jaken to make more water. He was vaguely aware of the humans mentioning him, but Sesshomaru didn't care.

"Son of Taisho! Is your daughter in need of a healer?!" Sesshomaru sliced his eyes to the Thor. Thor's chest hitched. Sesshomaru knew Thor didn't particularly like being on the receiving end of that glare.

"It's probably heat exhaustion and dehydration. We can give her medical assistance in the quinjet. You shouldn't try to give her water; her system will reject it." The huntress clipped and Sesshomaru, unintentionally, began to make his way back to the humans.

He could not heal Rin if he did not know what threats or treatments this realm had. He walked calmly the humans, including the man who turned into his true form earlier. He stood closer to them, much closer than from the distance he was at before when the fighting occurred.

"You can trust them Son of Taisho. You have my solemn vow they will not harm you or your daughter. Come with us and we shall get your situation sorted. Though I am curious how you managed to copulate and produce a mortal!" Sesshomaru almost sighed. Almost. Sesshomaru nodded instead to Thor. Did Thor get denser in the years he did not see him?

"I will allow you to nurse my ward. I will also accompany you in your...device to your fortress. Come Jaken." Sesshomaru looked into the hard, blue eyes of the woman. By most human accounts and even some Demon, she was quite striking. She wore a black suit, again similar to Inuyasha's friend, Sango. She held herself like a huntress, proud, silent and sure.

"Hmph, casual talker I see. My name is Natasha Romanoff. Can't say I'm sorry about the bullets though." She put out her hand and her eyes went to his chest. Sesshomaru barely remembered in some realms people shook hands. He was far from home indeed. The thought sunk his stomach.

He shook her hand, her hands calloused like he expected. He would greet this adversary.

"I'm Steve Rogers." He also put out his hand. This human, also comely, seemed stronger than the huntress, the archer, and armored man.

"I do not greet those wearing only their bedclothes." Sesshomaru sneered with disdain and the four humans around him broke into snickering laughter.

"My...my uniform is not a pair of pajamas! It has Kevlar in it!" Their leader professed and Sesshomaru ignored it. He looked ridiculous.

"I'm Tony Stark, Iron Man, all around badass. I forgive you for turning me into Cinderella, glass slipper and all." Sesshomaru blinked at 'Tony Stark'. He shook his hand, somewhat confused.

"Your yapping is unnecessary." Sesshomaru stated, looking into the mirthful brown eyes of the man and he could see the feigned hurt.

"Most things I love about me are unnecessary!" Sesshomaru's eyebrows raised as the human put his arms out, as if gesturing to his whole body.

"I'm Clint Barton, Hawkeye. Let me get one thing straight, I don't care how close you are to Loki but his ass is mine, so don't get in my way." Clint put out his hand and Sesshomaru's eyebrows
furrowed as he shook it.

He inhaled the air around Barton deeply. He could smell the faintest tinge of Loki's aged protection magic coming from him. Territorial lover? It would explain the ire and the crude vernacular for procreation.

It didn't explain the arrow earlier, perhaps Loki had dallied with another while being involved with the archer?

"I can understand why Loki would take you as a lover, your skills in archery, for a human, are to be lauded." Sesshomaru conceded and turned to the quinjet with Rin in his left arm.

Silence.

If the bedclothes earned him some chuckles the this was a howling burst of raucous laughter.

"Oh, sweet mother of-
"I'm so sorry Clint but-
"This guy, this guy is good."
"That's what she said? That's current right?"
"Hawk's eye you have bedded my brother?!"

Sesshomaru stood rigidly, he had never had humans laugh because of anything he said. Humans feared him, they strictly avoided him. These humans had a death wish. Sesshomaru's frown erased itself into a neutral expression as the archer's face turned deep red.

"I'm getting on the jet. I am done." Barton stomped into the jet and the others followed in suit, attempting to console him. Except one.

"Berserker." Sesshomaru regarded icily.

"I'm actually Dr. Bruce Banner. I'm a doctor, a healer. I can treat your...ward, Rin is her name?" Sesshomaru's youki spiked in response and his pupils slit dangerously.

"You? A reckless danger to your own allies and yourself shall not touch her." Sesshomaru fangs lengthened and by the momentary shocked expression on the Berserker's face, Sesshomaru could tell he saw them.

"I understand. I would like to know how you stopped my rage, no one has been able to stop the other guy like that before." Sesshomaru reined in his anger. Clearly this human has had no teacher for his transformation.

"I disciplined you. You require an instructor in transformation. I will not oblige." Sesshomaru brushed by the doctor with palpable scorn. They both seated themselves inside the jet, and the huntress Romanoff informed him Rogers, the one in bedclothes, would return with aid for Rin.

Jaken sat beside him.

"Lord Sesshomaru why don't we ju-" Sesshomaru cut Jaken off with a gaze that could pierce steel.

"Do you question me Jaken?" Sesshomaru leveled. He would not reveal to these humans all of his abilities, including flight. Not even Thor or Loki knew he could fly.

"No of course not Lord Sesshomaru!" Sesshomaru, on cue, cracked his knuckles and released a small amount of toxin onto the metal hull of the jet.
He relaxed when he smelled and heard the metal corrode and dissipate beneath his fingers. If need be he could easily disable this flying device and escape with Jaken and Rin.

Sesshomaru's mind whirled, taking in everything around him. The huntress Romanoff and the archer Barton were seated at the head of the bird, appearing to control it as one would a ship.

Sesshomaru could not afford to appear ignorant of his environment.

"Here, uh. This should help her feel better. She probably has a mild case of heat exhaustion is all." Rogers stammered a bit and Sesshomaru gazed into his blue eyes, noting his sincerity.

'He is probably one of those...charitable morons like Inuyasha's priestess Kagome.' Sesshomaru noted as he watched the armored man remove his armor automatically.

"I accept your aid." Sesshomaru took the cool, wet pack and put it to Rin's forehead. She stirred not much later to the relief of Sesshomaru.

"Lord Sesshomaru! Rin is sorry, she felt dizzy and fell. Where are we, are they our friends now?!!" Rin looked around wearily, the others looked to her curiously. Sesshomaru opened the top of the bottle with a sharp claw and drank some.

His body could easily detect and nullify poisons. He tasted none, though it was sickeningly sweet.

"Drink Rin. You are in civil company." Sesshomaru gave her the rest of the bottle. The grinding in his lung intensified once more, and he felt slightly short of breath.

"You were testing to see if the drink was poisoned weren't you??" Rogers looked offended. Sesshomaru leveled a neutral stare. Rin laughed and drank, feeling better.

"Son of Taisho you do not have to suspect false of us. You are in good company!" Thor's eyes slanted in concern as Sesshomaru's lip twitched and he picked up Rin to place her between Jaken and himself.

Sesshomaru had no course of action but to remove the offending object from just chest before he did something embarrassing like cough up blood.

Using his youki he withdrew his pelt and armor, they shrunk and thinned until he was just in his yukata.

"Whoa. Dinner and a show?!" The archer called out from the front of their flying device.

"Lord Sesshomaru you are injured?!" Rin exclaimed seeing the vast expanse of blood that soaked the fine white silk.

"Son of Taisho you need a healer!" Thor blurted out.

"This Sesshomaru is fine. Rin look away." Sesshomaru cracked his claw on his left hand and extended two of his fingers' claws long. He then opened his yukata and found the remaining offending hole in his chest.

Then he dug his fingers in deep to the wound, opening it wider, fresh blood flowing freely.

"God, this just keeps getting better. Thor do you have any non-creepy, sadistic, friends? Like what hazing ritual do you have whatever masochistic frat you pledged?" Sesshomaru heard the armored man, Stark, make a noise as if disgusted.
'Good, let them be disgusted, better than to see me weak. Apparently they take care of injuries differently in this realm. I almost have the damned...bullet was it?' Sesshomaru suppressed a wince as his two claws grasped the slug and began to slowly extract it.

"Man of Iron, I do not understand your references and I assure you Son of Taisho will not as well since he is not of this time." Thor educated and Sesshomaru nearly lost his grip on the slippery metal object as he finally removed it from his lung.

"What, you're saying he traveled through time?!" Bedclothes, the leader's jaw dropped and Sesshomaru used almost all of his control to appear composed as possible. He held the bloody hunk of metal in his hand, trying to understand how such a small piece of metal managed to cause so much irritation.

"Yes, his time is about half a millennium in the past." Thor stated as if he said it was sunny outside. In response Sesshomaru produced enough toxin to corrode and vaporize the gnarled metal in his hand. His eyes wide.

'My time? half a millennium?' Sesshomaru carefully regarded Thor, he indeed looked older, but acted much the same. This was no jest.

"Ok, I gotta admit that was pretty badass for someone who came straight from Memoirs of a Geisha. Natasha did you see him extract a bullet from his chest with his hand and then disintegrate it? I gotta get my hands on that." Stark the armored one announced and the huntress made a scoffing sound.

"Lord Sesshomaru! Did you hear the Storm God?! We are five hundred years in the future! How could this be?!" Jaken squawked and Sesshomaru couldn't be bothered to silence him, because he thought the same. He had no idea Loki had this ability.

With a flare of youki Sesshomaru donned his armor and fur once more, a physical security blanket. Five hundred years. His lands would be splintered, his legacy for naught. Would his name be forgotten? What of Ah-Un? What of...Inuyasha? He is, was, just a Hanyou. He would be old by now, perhaps dead. Especially if he wasn't there to assist him out of trouble.

"Loki..." Sesshomaru growled, teeth clenched. He fought the angers steaming to the surface, his youki needling to be free. His fangs lengthened, hair bristled, and his senses flooded. The edges of his eyes bled slightly red and his magenta markings danced on his face.

"Um, guys if I'm not mistaken he looks like I do before I decide to Hulk out." Sesshomaru felt fourteen eyes on him and the smell of fear intensify. Now was not the time to lose composure.

He looked to his side, Rin was still drinking the red concoction looking up to him with her head cocked to one side. He took a deep, unimpeded breath.

"Son of Taisho! Did you not know when you are?! I thought surely there would have been communication when the Bifrost appeared so you would know to whence you arrived." Thor rocked back. And Sesshomaru hardened a gaze at the golden God. He just made him look like a fool! Some lost little demon, it was too late to save face now.

"As I said, your brother will come to me." Sesshomaru's tone iced out the plane, and suddenly no one knew what was going on.
the following pairings for the fic will be Clint/Loki, Sesshomaru/Tony

with maybe some little surprise pairings (squint and you can see them) and some 'blurred line' pairings as well. hope you enjoy the fic! please let me know how you like it! :)
Tony Stark knew a lot of things. He was a genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist and of course Iron Man. He knew astrophysics, advanced mathematics, mechanical and chemical engineering, how to have mind blowing sex, how to make a bangin’ Singapore Sling cocktail, and how to program a TiVo.

What he had no clue about was this Demon Lord sitting at his 2 o’clock in the Quinjet.

And Tony hated not knowing things.

Tony nearly upended his worktable when Jarvis sounded the alarm for the Bifrost activating, when Thor was confirmed planet side, and a keen source of Loki’s magic pinging from New Mexico.

Damn was he ever thankful he had put in the time and energy, in between making all his new suits, to develop his Magic Signature Detection System, or as he sometimes referred to it: Rudolph Radar.

He donned his fastest suit, the Mark XLVI, didn't bother alerting SHIELD, and went Loki hunting.

Only it wasn't Loki. Not by a long shot. This guy looked on first glance like he came from a failed Coachella inspired fashion show. Hindsight being 20/20 he shouldn't have automatically assumed he was Loki, the look in those gold eyes should have signaled that to him enough.

Those cold, calculating, apathetic eyes, lidded with an impressive shade of 'maybe it's Maybelline' crimson looked at him as if he was nothing. No hint of recognition. Just a slit pupil that screamed boredom.

That and maybe Loki would have chosen a less conspicuous disguise.

But, he did come down from the Bifrost, Thor was on Earth, which suggested, hey maybe he could have escaped. Like Tony knew how stringent prisoner protocol was in Asgard.

And he sure as hell didn't look like anyone Thor would hang out with. When something looks evil, and pings with evil magic energy: you go with evil.

But, of course, according to Pepper, since nothing in his life was simple, he was in for a surprise.

Because the mystery man pulled out surprise after surprise. He dodged an arrow fired from an almost impossibly close distance considering Clint's accuracy and hatred for the supposed target. Which, his current mood was making everyone on edge and uncomfortable, Nat said he had been pissy since they got word about the Bifrost. Hopefully he will cool his jets soon and go back to normal, or Nat might kill him with her nail polish or something.

Or the Demon Lord might glare him to death.
Like a fucking champ, Sailor Moon took a hit from Capsicle's shield, it sounded worse than nails on a chalkboard or Thor's singing. He moved like water, sort of like you'd expect from a Bruce Lee movie.

Jarvis was right as usual. Whatever energy levels that personally guy put out were definitely not on the same frequency nor wavelength as Loki's magic. It didn't even flow the same.

But something on him was definitely radiating Loki's magic.

Tony didn't have much time to reflect on 'Magic Theory 101' when he heard a tall-tell roar from his number one Green Rage Monster.

'Then of course, he stopped the Mean Green after he knocked me out. And not like just stopped, he made the unstoppable Hulk go all 'Hello God, It's me Margaret' into the sky. The Hulk looked like a dog in training school, and he didn't even lay a hand on him. Then of course I offended the cosplayer and his damn 'Fifty Shades of Grey' whip flung me into Clint like I was a tether-ball. My skin still singes. I'm gonna have to study that compound.' Thought Tony, twisting his face as if trying to will the chemical compound of the whip to his frontal cortex.

Then, mystery man took three glock 17 rounds to the chest and stood there like someone blew him a damn kiss. Center mass! Tony knew how terrible shrapnel felt lacerating into his chest, the terror of waking up with a car battery sticking out of your sternum like a R/C car.

'No. Not going there. I need to focus on the Demon Lord who, apparently, goes way back with Thor. And by way back, I mean longer than America was a country.' Tony scratched his neck, maybe this guy wasn't evil.

'Fashionably late Good ol' Point Break shows up, preventing what was probably going to be a shit-storm of a fight, saying they're old drinking buddies or Shakespeare theatre club members. He honestly doesn't look like anyone Thor would hang out with, his Asgardian buddies are a lot cheerier and brawny and a lot less arrogant and pale.' Tony leaned back, fiddling with the severed boot of his suit, noting that the cut was clean and hardly warped.

The vibes from Point Break and Sailor Moon's whole conversation was that he seemed a lot closer to Loki, or at least knew him better. Which made sense, Loki could probably only be friends with someone with as nuts as a fashion sense as he did, your posse has to keep up, totes. Obvs. Whatevs.

And Loki.

He also claimed he can just summon Loki. Loki! The God of mischief, lies and trickery, who doesn't answer to anyone or anything not even his own logic, or common sense most likely. Coachella insisted he could, in a tone that left doubt even in Thor's mind, and he was all gung-ho about the strength of Asgard's defenses. Sailor Moon even scoffed when Thor told him he was locked up better than the Queen's jewels, that Loki would just hang out in prison, for shits-and-giggles.

The regal pompousness on this Demon Lord could match Fury's ego in size. Tony figured no just one orders Loki around, divas don't respond well to orders. Tony knew from experience.

This silver haired, face tattooed, boa wearing Demon brought with him a daughter, ward, mystery Japanese girl, and a creepy toad servant he calls Jerky, Jermaine? Single father Demon Lord with a frog nanny. Wasn't there a sitcom about that?

Of course, too, not ten seconds ago he watched him put his own fingers in his chest to pull out the
bullet with his claws and melt it. And he did it without even a wince. Christ.

He had Pepper do it to him before, but at least he already had a hand-sized hole. He tweezed open his own like it was no big deal.

In fact, the entire damn fight he treated it like was no big deal to him, even when they taunted him. His level of sheer zen was astounding. Like nothing could get under his skin. Monks could take tips from this guy, Loki too. Bruce too. Maybe he could start a meditation circle.

Then, to top it off, he showed his first burst of emotion about when, not where, the he is and the edges of his eyes bled red and his face tattoos morphed. Was he a pokemon? Did they miss out on his evolution into David Bowie?

Tony Stark was utterly intrigued.

"What is this guy gonna do next? and what is SHIELD going to do when they find out not only Gods are real, but Demons are too, and they're bros with Gods? So much for Sunday Mass. It doesn't help Sailor Moon looks positively feral and elegant at the same time. Like you could totally see him eating a person, but with good table manners, like some badly written Ann Rice vampire novel. Drag Queen of the Damned." Tony laughed to himself while his thoughts spun. Tony couldn't help but sneak peaks at the Demon Lord when he thought he wasn't looking.

"Wow, and you thought you had it bad Cap. At least cars were invented and the pyramids stood." Tony smirked at Clint trying to assuage some of the tension in the plane.

"Tony, the pyramids definitely were around five hundred years ago." Steve replied, only slightly amused.

"You know, I bet there wasn't even Starbucks, or Hagen Daas, both of which are better than the pyramids anyway, if I'm being buried under a huge monument with all of my stuff I sure don't want it to be in a desert where no one can properly admire it." Tony caught Bruce rolling his eyes dramatically, like he didn't already appreciate the monument to his greatness, Stark Tower.

"You can't take it with you, Tony." Steve leaned back, almost as if a challenge.

"Not with that attitude. An eternity of afterlife would be too dull without my stuff." Tony gestured with a general wrist flick to Sesshomaru. "I bet Lestat's family over here does monuments." Tony jutted his chin up.

"Lord Sesshomaru has a grand castle you ignorant human! It goes back many a generation in his father's family! You'd do well to respect that fact!" Toady threw a fit and Tony was starting to wonder how quickly another fight would break out if he threw the leprechaun from the Quinjet.

"Um, might want to check your verb tense there, Lucky Charms." Tony grinned and Jaken began to sputter until Rin gave him some of her Gatorade. Which, yes Sailor Moon Steve is not going to poison a little girl.

They were the good guys the last time he checked, though he doubted even Loki would stoop so low to poison a child. Maybe. Sailor Moon continued to watch Clint and Natasha, ignoring Tony completely.

'What was so interesting about Natasha and Clint the—Oh. They're piloting. He has never even seen this before. He must think Clint…Oh god Clint! I almost forgot the lover's comment between him and Loki. And bed clothes! The guy is an unintentional riot. If he had Youtube back in his era of huts and basic cable, he would've totally had a channel with millions of subscribers. Hell, I'd be
his first one.' Tony smirked, however, he couldn't help but sort of feel bad for the guy.

He gets pulled out of whatever Demon Lords do in their spare time, probably eating skulls, to five hundred years in the future and then immediately attacked by technology he doesn't understand, controlled by people thinking he was someone else and his daughter (ward?) Rin gets sick and now he is stuck in a sweaty, almost sausage fest of a plane ride... And he didn't even know planes existed.

'If I were him, I'd have lost my mind already. He is mellow to the max, and we are a big bag of dicks.' Tony sighed, knowing that he was about to do something he rarely did, admit a fuck-up.

"Look, I gotta say on behalf of the Avengers, we fucked up for attacking you and well mistaking you for a shape shifting war criminal without even asking for license and registration first. It's poor form on our part, and you're right, Clint probably does need a shower." Tony admitted and he caught those wild, but cold as liquid nitrogen eyes.

He felt speared in place, like the Demon Lord was shredding his brain with a simple stare.

"Hey, speak for yourself, you crashed into me, Pepe-Le Pew!" Clint retorted, with an outdated metaphor.

"Um. Thrown into you. What you didn't get taught dodging in SHIELD basic, stink-eye? Picked last in dodgeball growing up? Pan hands?" Tony quipped back and he swore he saw the Demon Lord's eyes flicker. So he does have emotions!

"Yes. I'd like apologize as well. In America, where um, you are now, what we did is frowned upon. We shouldn't have just assumed you were Loki. We didn't even give you a chance to state your peace. Even though you're, a Demon, and we've all be taught Demons are evil. This isn't how I like to operate." Steve actually looked guilty. Too bad he now works for SHIELD which isn't above detaining people without a trial, maybe Cap hadn't noticed that yet. Tony released a breath he didn't notice he was holding when Sesshomaru's gaze stopped boring into him and languidly rolled over to regard Cap.

This really does guy looks like he eats people.

"Friends, I can assure you Son of Taisho is not evil. Demons...we...are simply another race, like the Aesir." Thor boomed seriously. Tony figured there was more to this than he thought. Steve didn't look convinced, his biceps were still bulging all 'imminent threat' like.

Sesshomaru ignored Thor.

"I accept your apology. As proof, I will spare the life of the huntress Romanoff who soiled my garment." Sesshomaru answered in a deep serious tenor that wasn't supposed to sound funny, but it was. Soiled his garment?! She shot you! He heard Clint and Bruce laugh.

"We can always finish our fight when we land Pretty Boy!" Natasha called back and Tony noticed Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow.

"Well if you aren't talking out your ass and you can genie Loki out his Asgardian prison cell I'll wash the damn thing for you, hell I'll even make one for me and wear it. It's a bet." Tony laughed then stopped laughing when a vicious growl rumbled from Sesshomaru and in a flash of a striped wrist he was grappled by the throat.

'I'm gonna die, his grip is harder than steel. Having trouble breathing. Someone shoot him. Clint, I take it back, shoot him!' Tony's thoughts scattered.
"Watch your tongue human. I do not state falsehoods. He will arrive." And as quickly as he gripped his throat he released it. Steve looked like they were about to do something but the shock and speed of it all took him by surprise.

"Son of Taisho! He means no offense! Please refrain from harming my fellow Avengers!" Thor protested heartily. Sesshomaru responded with a dull gaze.

'Thanks Thor, where was an actual defense when he was actually strangling me?! Damn, this better not leave a bruise. I do not need TMZ thinking I have an asphyxiation kink. Again' Tony rubbed his neck, plotting his revenge on the newcomer Sailor Moon. Maybe he should have Jarvis test the Demon Lord's dodging capabilities.

"Yeah, that's really not gonna help the blood pressure of the 'berserker' either." Bruce muttered, getting himself under control.

"Storm God, why are you calling Lord Sesshomaru Son of Taisho? I don't like humans much, but you aren't a human. Is there food?" Rin asked and everyone except Tony and Natasha ignored it. Tony didn't know what she was talking about. He could read Japanese, sure. But, his listening comprehension was a bit spotty outside the basic phrases of 'tie me up', 'harder, faster', and 'thank you Mr. Roboto'.

"Ah little one! I call him Son of Taisho because of his father. A truly grand Demon Lord! We were very bereaved when he was slain. And you shall most promptly discover that the mortals you find yourself in the company of are most pleasant as are their refreshments and pastries. We shall feast when we arrive!" Thor responded excitedly, Tony forgot how excited he got over food.

"Oh yeah, I forgot all-speak. That's nifty. So, you're the only one who can understand her. Do like, Demons also have this all-speak?" Steve asked nervously, Tony could tell the guy unnerved him a bit.

"We can communicate with anything based on our youki! Do not underestimate our intellect and power!" Toady spoke up, shaking his creepy fucking staff, were those real heads? Did Coachella eat two people and make a staff with their heads?

"I can also mostly understand her, though my Japanese is rusty, and her accent and word choice is odd." Interjected Natasha. Tony wondered if the modelling gig in Tokyo he has stumbled upon when Fury had her shadow him was actually legit. Maybe there were more photos.

Hell, Sailor Moon could model, he has cheekbones that could cut concrete. Tony noticed that Sesshomaru either had completely zoned out or was slowly being bored to death.

"Ok Storm God! Your friends are weird, and they better not make Sesshomaru angry again!" Rin sing-songed and began to swing her feet. Thor laughed and Tony hated being left out of jokes.


Tony was rewarded a flicker of a gaze in his direction.

"Rin's pastimes are arranging flowers and fishing." He answered simply. Rin nodded and smiled brightly. Alright, outdoorsy types, makes sense it's not like she had a Wii.
"Yeah...you know you're damned good at getting out of questions." Tony leaned back and crossed his arms over his arc reactor. Sesshomaru merely looked away, as if pretending to act innocent. Like hell this guy was innocent of anything.

They enjoyed a comfortable silence for a good eight minutes before surprisingly Sesshomaru broke it.

"What means of power device is in your chest?" Sesshomaru inquired his sharp eyes darting to Tony's chest. Tony grinned like a Cheshire cat.

"How 'bout this Coachella, I'll answer your question if you answer one of mine. Tit for tat." Tony challenged, raising an eyebrow. He knew he could get this guy to talk.

Sesshomaru blinked in response and Tony could smell smoke Sesshomaru was thinking so hard.

"So be it." Sesshomaru straightened in his seat, his silver hair escaped his back and cascaded down his shoulders. Tony could barely refrain from asking what his hair care regimen was. Probably the tears of his enemies and soon to be happy meals.

"This," Tony tapped the arc reactor "is something I created called an arc reactor. It's a clean energy reactor. It ensures that the shrapnel near my heart doesn't shred me to bits. I'm a genius, it's a pretty awesome, don't mean to brag too much." Tony expected Sesshomaru to have a bit more of a reaction than just a quiet hum. Usually people were all 'Oh Tony, can you take off your shirt so I can see it better?!' well ok, that was mostly women and men he was intent on seducing.

"Lord Sesshomaru, it's not unlike the Shikon jewel correct?!" Toady supplied. Sesshomaru nodded slowly.

"Similarities are apparent." Sesshomaru agreed and he heard Steve snicker. Tony could not believe it. His arc reactor was nothing like some jewel!

"Ok, this baby is nothing like a jewel or gem or whatever. I did not bedazzle myself." Tony defended, pounding his fist into his chest for effect.

"I don't know Tony; it does look like a nice brooch. Maybe you should get some earrings to match." Natasha chuckled and Tony huffed in indignation.

"Allfather once gifted my mother Frigga a ring of a matching hue of your circle of power Man of Iron! I can inquire from which market he made the purchase if you would like!" Thor smiled and Tony just put his head in his hands. Thor would do it too.

This arrogant Demon Lord just turned what was arguably his best invention, and coolest thing ever into a damn piece of jewelry. He was not the 'Pretty Pretty Princess board game' damnit!

"You are impossible." Tony muttered, glaring at Sesshomaru in frustration, but Sesshomaru was too busy looking at Natasha. Pervert.

"Oh yeah, 'He's' impossible." Clint smirked at Tony. Tony wished he had just gone solo to New Mexico, but no, he just had to get drunk one night and tell Natasha all about the magic detector he created. Of course, Fury was at his door the next morning asking for it. Thus, the super-secret boy band had assembled again.

"Ok, whatever. My turn. What is your goal? I never met a Demon Lord before so, gotta ask. World domination? Beauty contest? Enslavement of all humanity? Séance director?" Tony volleyed a few guesses to kick-start the conversation.
Sesshomaru put a finger to his lips thoughtfully and eyes went to the up and left. Tony found himself on the edge of his seat.

"My goal is to return to my time with Rin and Jaken." Sesshomaru supplied listlessly, and if Tony didn't know any better the bastard led him on. Tony face-palmed.

"No. You know what I meant. No evading, answer the real question!" Tony all but demanded. He felt his ears get hot, this guy irritated him to no end.

"This Sesshomaru did not evade you. It is no fault of my own you did not pose the question you desired to ask." Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed, the crimson on his lids contrasting the gold well. Tony obviously knew that, his Iron Mans suits practically matched his eyes perfectly.

"Fine, be that way. I'll just ask your bro Thor." Tony turned to a perplexed Thor.

"We are not brothers." Sesshomaru and Thor chorused at the same time. Tony rolled his eyes, great we had to go into idioms and slang again. He should have charged Steve and Thor for swag lessons.

"Not this again." Bruce had enough of it as well.

"Oh! I know this one. In this instance Tony is speaking of you two being so close of friends you may as well be brothers." Steve smiled helpfully, which did nothing to lift Sailor Moon's frosty glare.

"Thank you, urban dictionary." Clint called out. This time Tony snickered at Steve, payback.

"Son of Taisho and I are friends yes, but he and my brother were far closer. He may have the answer you seek Son of Stark." Thor informed.

"Ok, no more Son of Stark business, this is not Game of Thrones." Tony interjected, He couldn't get for the life of him why Loki called him 'Stark' but Thor insisted on the Shakespeare.

'Bingo, thought so. So, Sailor Moon and Reindeer Games were like old partners in crime. Explains a lot, both arrogant, irritating and dress like they're vying for best costume at Comic-con. Sailor Moon though definitely has the intimidating death glare down, and Bambi the maniacal laugh. They could be the perfect villains for some obscure comic book.' Tony caught a flash of dark movement from the cockpit. Clint. Pissed again.

"Whoa. Whoa. Hold the phone you and Loki are friends!?!" Clint's blood pressure raised at least a hundred points and the Quinjet lurched violently to the side. Tony, only because he helped design the damned things, knew it wasn't enough to send the plane into a death-spin, but he knew the others may not know that fact.

"Please don't crash us Clint." Bruce requested mildly, but Tony could have sworn he could see his skin turn a little green. Yeah. Piss off the rage monster Clint, that will help your issues.

All eyes darted from Thor to Sesshomaru.

Tony watched as Sesshomaru looked around the jet. 'Probably assessing how to get his ass out of the frying pan without getting into the fire.' Tony tensed, Steve reared back shocked.

"Clint, he's from five hundred years in the past remember?" Natasha sounded irritated. Tony then flashed back to logic. Of course. It's not like this guy was friends with Loki three years ago. She was probably about to strangle him because whenever Clint thought of Loki he didn't think
logically. Clint was still pretty sore about the brainwashing even though it was almost three years ago. His mood on the ground showed it.

"Next round of question game. I ask you one and you can ask one of me." Tony shot over to Sesshomaru and he looked unimpressed.

"I acquiesce." Sesshomaru nodded almost imperceptibly. Tony took that as a 'Hell yes Tony Stark, pinnacle genius of the 21st century' agreement.

'Finally, he pays attention to me! The Quinjet isn't that cool, I should show him my G6. The G6 as better seats, and a full bar' Tony smirked, blood tingling for a scotch.

"What did you and Loki do together specifically, and for how long?" And the jet stilled in anticipation. Tony didn't know if sex acts contributed to something he saw, or didn't see coming.

"We completed various quests over three hundred and forty years. We also collaborated on subjects of tactics, strategy, swordsmanship, hand-to-hand combat and artistry." Sesshomaru punctuated each item like a bullet point on a resume. Tony was a bit slack jawed, three hundred and forty years!? These two were more than just friends; it sounds like a bromance. They were 'Lord of The Ringsing' it for almost as long as America was a country!

"Lord Sesshomaru I had no idea you could do art! How wonderful!" Rin beamed. Tony and the others, excluding Natasha and Thor, had no idea what she said. Yet, Tony could tell she felt nothing but pride and wonder. This little girl really thought this guy hung the moon. Well, he did have one on his forehead.

"Nothing like playing Dungeons and Dragons, Risk, and arts and crafts with a lunatic sorcerer." Clint, ever the sarcastic one, gave his two cents. Thor's brow furrowed in thought and Tony caught it. Was this a sore subject for Point Break?

Sesshomaru shot a glare towards Clint in retaliation. Natasha turned her head to Clint almost in a warning stance.

"How old are you? You don't mind me asking?" Bruce asked quietly from the corner. Tony almost forgot about the green machine.

"I am four hundred ninety-three years old." Sesshomaru admitted, as if age was nothing but a number. Tony had to admit, he looked good for a five-hundred-year old skull eater.

"Hey why'd he get a free question?!" Tony feigned indignation, Sailor Moon's eyes lit up like candles. Tony immediately forgot why he was annoyed, and instead focused on the reaction he managed to get from 'Mr. Sword In The Stone'.

"Aye! You matured so quickly! When we first crossed swords you appeared to be aged no more than fifteen human years! You now look much older!" Thor contributed and Tony couldn't help but try to envision a fifteen-year-old Demon Lord try to kick Thor's ass.

Sailor Moon cracked his knuckles, as if challenging Thor.

'Oh shit, what if he could kick Thor's ass?' Tony stiffened a bit, is that why Thor didn't directly help him? Was Sailor Moon that much agile than he was?

"Sell your secrets to Estee Lauder, they'd pay a fortune for your youthful glow." Bruce joked, Sesshomaru shifted.
"It's your turn." Tony directed to Sesshomaru. "Fire away grandpa!" Tony sat back, ready to slam dunk any question.

Pause.

"I lack a pertinent question." Sesshomaru flat lined and Tony nearly pulled hair out of his head. What?!

"You lack a pertinent question?! You are five hundred years in the future, on a different continent, in a... a jet you've never even seen before, with five strangers who you never met before who attacked you with weapons you didn't know existed before. To top it off the Harry Potter to your Hermione Granger is imprisoned for war crimes and you don't have a single pertinent question?!" Tony garbled, exasperated.

'Just who was this guy?! He had no questions?!' Tony lost it, absolutely lost it. Who was this guy?!

'Correct." Sesshomaru's golden eyes held a faint, but rare glimmer noticeable only to Rin and Jaken both of whom looked a bit puzzled. Tony heard Natasha snort from the front seat. Voyeur.

Tony clenched and unclenched his fists and he heard Bruce chuckle. What was he laughing at? This wasn't a joke!

"Does that make Clint, Ginny Weasely?" Bruce's face held a wicked grin and the Quinjet lurched again.

"Nat hand me my bow." Clint demanded, seventy percent serious. He even reached his hand out to her like she would actually do his dirty work for him. Well, maybe she did, but she didn't seem to be entertaining the thought tonight.

"Loki is really more of a Draco Malfoy." Natasha admitted, purposefully ignoring Clint.

"You are all so lively and jovial! It has been a while since we have all congregated has it not friends?!" Thor laughed excitedly and for a second it fell a bit silent.

It had indeed been a quiet thirty-three months. The Avengers had not been all called together since Loki and the Battle of New York.

'Maybe that's why I jumped the gun over stoic statue over here. I've been itching to do anything, fight for something. Iron Man was simply not meant to patrol the streets looking for a simple liquor store robbery or making promotional appearances. I didn't create so many suits just to keep my nightmares at bay.' Tony crossed his arms in front of his chest again, defensively. Defensively at what, or who he wasn't sure.

"Yes, it has. It's nice to be all together fighting for a common purpose again." Steve caught a side-eye from Sesshomaru. "However, mistaken the original intention was." Steve coughed. Awkward.

"It's good to see everyone well." Natasha added, with a slight smile that Tony could spot from the tone of her voice.

"Well, it certainly isn't boring." Bruce agreed, begrudgingly. Tony had collaborated with him sporadically across the past two years, but the ever-private Rage Monster had often left secretly for months at a time.

"Yeah, yeah, one big family reunion. Did someone make potato salad?!" Tony couldn't help
himself and Clint laughed heartily, finally getting out of his funk.

"And see Son of Taisho it is all because of you! You have my thanks! It has been too long for our reunion" Thor put his hand up in a high five motion and Sesshomaru looked at him as if he had grown a second head.

"Oh yes! Midguardians have a custom called a 'high five'. It involves slapping hands when a victory is achieved or an unexpected great event occurs!" Tony could have sworn Thor was treating him like a former bro. Sailor Moon, if he cared for Thor's frat, didn't seem like he wanted to pledge it.

'Maybe I should buy a keg when we get back and see if Thor would do a keg stand. Sesshomaru would probably cut his hair before doing one.' Tony rattled off in his head where he could find a keg. Also, he had an inkling that the Demon Lord was vain about his long hair.

"You can't leave Thor hangin'!" Clint supplied and Sesshomaru looked down to Rin who immediately understood and jumped up and slapped her hand against Thor's. She giggled and danced in a satisfied jig.

"Calling in assists is cheating." Tony scowled, but even he had to admit it made for the perfect Kodak moment: small adorable Japanese girl high fives Nordic Golden God. It was like an Apple ad if they had iphones.

"Lord Sesshomaru does not cheat! He does not find it a suitable use of his time and effort!" Toady shook that gross staff again. Tony really wanted to ask what it was, but he was simultaneously terrified of the answer he would get. He could tell the heads looked human enough…but still…seriously?!

"Lord Sesshomaru I like the Storm God! He reminds me a little of Uncle Inuyasha!" Rin smiled and Sesshomaru stilled a bit. Tony could instantly tell by his demeanor he got stressed.

"He is far more agreeable than Inuyasha, and a more skilled warrior, there is hardly a resemblance." Sesshomaru answered with a pause. Tony had no idea who Inuyasha was but took note to ask him at some point.

"That buffoon Inuyasha could not ever be considered a God silly girl!" Jaken shook his head, dispelling the idea. Rin stuck her tongue out at Frogman.

"Hey I hate to crash the good mood but we need to tell Fury what or who we found in the desert and what happened." Natasha reminded, and silence weighed in heavy. Tony rubbed his goatee in thought. This could get tricky, Fury gets nosey.

"I should have just gone on vacation like I wanted…” Clint groaned. Oh, poor Clint, it’s not like anyone held a gun to his head to come.

"Tell him it was a fool's errand. That nothing was found and that my brother is still imprisoned." Thor suggested. Tony rolled his eyes. Like that would satisfy Fury, world greatest bullshit detector. Tony would know.

"Fury has my Rudolph Radar, thanks to Natasha. He will know are lying even if Miss Black widow 'spydar' herself tells him it was wonky." Tony pointed out, trying, and failing to read the expressionless silver haired Demon.

"I also reported in that we needed containment for the Hulk. He would know we found someone or some people." Natasha confessed, her voice low in irritation.
"Well, we can't very well tell him we attacked a Demon Lord thinking he was Loki. Fury would demand answers, first of all knowing what a Demon Lord is, what he is doing here, and what his intentions are. Especially his intentions and he is innocent." Steve groaned, Tony felt like joining him in a group groan. SHIELD always gave him a headache.

'What a damn mess.' Tony drummed his fingers on his arc reactor. Not arc reactor brooch, jewel thing, but a reactor. Comfort always flooded his senses when he tapped it.

"Remember, he is still bitter that Loki is on Asgard for his sentence, not here on Earth. Anything Loki related he is going to want blood. Hell, the world would want blood. They'd riot if this got out." Bruce chimed in, which caused Sesshomaru to swivel his head his way.

"We could tell Fury we found an unknown entity at the site of the Bifrost and are taking him to Thor for questioning." Natasha inputted in her typical, 'spycalculator' way she typically did.

"He would demand that he be brought directly to SHIELD. You know how much he trusts me anything Loki related." Clint countered automatically.

"Which we can't do, since he isn't Loki, but we can't prove since he has his magic signature" Bruce admitted, rubbing his eyes in defeat.

"What if we told commander Fury it was a beast we slew?!" Thor put a finger up and Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed to slits. Tony suppressed a chuckle barely.

"He'd want to see a body." Natasha fired back, Thor's face dampened.

"Well, as far as we know, at least Fury doesn't know Thor was even there, so we don't have to explain old friends, embarrassing frat stories, and baby photos." Tony attempted humor, but it fell flat and not even Bruce thought it was funny.

"He's going to wonder why we delayed in reporting in this much." Steve ran a hand through his perfect blond hair.

Pause.

"Romanoff has articulated an astute strategy. Loki's magic is not only unique to Loki, but to his mother and the distant realm King Odin, and perhaps others. Bedclothes, report to your commander that you have transported your quarry to Storm God for personal interrogation since you determined he not of this realm." Sesshomaru's calm demeanor acted like a salve on a burn.

"Not a bad idea for a Project Runway dropout." Tony reacted a little shocked, for someone who just fell out of the sky he caught on to scenarios quick. Maybe he wasn't just for show after all.

"That. Could. Work. We just tell him we found someone that wasn't a hostile. Wait did you just call me bedclothes?" Steve brightened then his jaw dropped in confusion.

"I may have to steal bedclothes." Tony smirked and he blocked an empty Gatorade bottle chucked his way by Steve.

"I see summer camp for the rich, power hungry, and immortal has paid off." Clint gave a thumbs-up.

"We will explain our delay in reporting in by trying to contact Thor and medical assistance. Stark play up that ankle burn. Rogers only mention one person at the site." Natasha fell back into her typical assassin rhythm.
"Like Leonardo DiCaprio vying for an Oscar. Natalie bring the Quinjet to Stark Tower. Fuck if Fury is going to come barging down my door, my security is tighter than your spandex." Tony barbed by purposely calling her by her 'shadow' name and Natasha raised an expertly waxed eyebrow.

"Already had the coordinates in. And nothing is tighter than my spandex." Natasha winked. Tony, reinvigorated, have Thor a good pat on the shoulder.

"When we arrive to the tower I will beseech Heimdall for information on the Bifrost. Surprise floods me that it was used for travelling though time. I must consult the Allfather about this, and why you feel of Loki's magic." Thor put his hand under his chin, deep in thought which was foreign territory for the 'Storm God'. Tony noticed Sesshomaru had pursed his lips.

"Yeah, what's up with that Sailor Moon? I got Loki's bad attitude magic signature all over you like a bad suit…or kimono, but underneath it all, I have your energy signature. Did Loki have a thing for boas?" Tony inquired and to his surprise the Demon Lord closed his eyes. His crimson eyelids fell like curtains and for a moment he looked tired. He exhaled through his nose and opened his eyes at Tony, expression masked.

"That is an additional inquiry I did not give consent to answer." Sesshomaru responded placidly.

Tony lost it again.

Chapter End Notes

Did some editing of this chapter, please let me know how you like it!

-TL
Sesshomaru smelt the stench and heard the commotion of large city before they came upon it, even over the roar of the flying device. His sensitive ears were unaccustomed to the clamor of this new realm.

Sesshomaru tensed, the amount of human energies and auras he sensed staggered him. He could not feel any youki at all. Were all of the here Demons in hiding? Were they all decimated? Did the Demon exterminators, monks and priestesses wipe out all the Demons in this region?

He felt his throat go dry. Did all humans have the capabilities that this handful did?

Sesshomaru didn't voice any questions ricocheting in his mind. He noted as well that Thor said nothing, maybe he didn't know. Maybe he wanted to wait to tell him what happened to his kind. Maybe there was nothing to tell.

Sesshomaru monitored Jaken, he knew all too well that the Kappa was rattled, uneasy and frightened. Sesshomaru had to keep his resolve intact to preserve his retainer's morale.

Though Sesshomaru rarely acknowledged it, Jaken's unwavering loyalty, although at times grating, aided him through dark times. He would ensure that he would not fall victim to any undue mistreatment from these humans.

"Just wait till you see the big apple! It's one of the best metropolises in world! It's the city that never sleeps!" Sesshomaru spared a glance to their leader, Bedclothes, who flashed a grin. Obviously trying to win Sesshomaru over with conversation.

"Hmmm." Sesshomaru replied not feeling particularly articulate, mind elsewhere.

"You humans named a city after a fruit? I will never understand your kind." Jaken's grip on the staff of two heads tightened in irritation.

"No Toady, it's called New York. Best city on the planet!" Barton the archer responded.

"You know Fury is unhappy. I bought us the night but by tomorrow is gonna try to kick down your door Tony." Natasha informed. Sesshomaru wondered how fearsome their commander was to inspire such a reaction out of his subordinates. He realized that whoever this was, he was admirable indeed.

'Their inherent need to prevent him from knowing my existence is both amusing and perplexing. Surely they believe not that their commander could harm me, the inverse must be true.' Sesshomaru continued to probe out with his youki, searching for any response.
"Watch him try. He can huff and he puff but he won't blow my house down. He'll get his after we get ours." Tony blurted out carelessly. Bruce's eyebrows shot up in what could have been easily interpreted as an implied threat but didn't say anything when he observed the silver haired demon Lord didn't even flinch.

Tenseiga pulsed softly

Bruce deducted something must be distracting him, or he figured out ignoring sixty percent of what Tony said was a sound strategy.

"We will have time to plan for Fury's debrief tonight. It's almost sunset anyway." Romanoff explained, sounding a touch weary.

"Hey dad can my friends sleep over?!" Barton the archer chimed in with a cheeky grin. Sesshomaru noted, yet again, these humans were utilizing terms and idioms he had no familiarity with. Or was Stark truly Barton's father? He doubted it as much.

It was becoming tiresome, but Sesshomaru had other larger issues, such as why Thor and even the armored man Stark could detect Loki's magic on him when he could not.

The scent of the magic gate had long since left him, and as he recalled in the past the magic gate was not Loki's magic. All Sesshomaru wanted was peace but he was clustered thick in a metal flying bird with a band of useless humans and an oblivious Storm God.

"Only if you promise not to queue up every rom com and Robert Downey Jr movie on my TiVo. I swear I don't look like him, and never hit heroin." Stark grumbled.

"Hey this is coming from the guy who made me sit through Hansel and Gretel Vampire Hunter because you thought I looked like Jeremy Renner." Barton shot back.

"Lord Sesshomaru, Rin wants to see Ah-Un and go flying, and maybe visit Inuyasha." Rin pouted. Rin never pouted. Sesshomaru frowned, so she too harbored a dislike for their new found surroundings.

"Fear not Rin. Ah-Un will be reunited with you." Sesshomaru comforted, voice distant. He too wished to see his valued steed again.

"I didn't even get to give Ah-Un the fish I caught for him." Rin scrunched her face and kicked her legs back and forth. Sesshomaru knew Rin needed sustenance, hopefully in this realm they provide nourishment that is better than that horrid red potion.

"Tell me of this Ah-Un Lady Rin!" Thor leaned forward ready for story time.

As Rin went on to describe the two headed dragon to Thor, and perhaps to an eavesdropping Romanoff, Sesshomaru attempted to a tactic to distract Thor and his band of humans so he could convene privately with Loki later, first he would have to scout the surrounding area that this fortress occupied.

"So, who is up for watching a movie when we get back? My vote is Lost in Translation." Natasha, uncharacteristically proposed.

"I've never seen it but it sounds like something I could relate to." Steve grinned self-deprecatingly.

"It's good. It has Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson in it. It's them going through an adjustment period in Tokyo. It sounds kind of appropriate, plus there is a lot of Japanese in it so Rin can watch
"You want Rin's first movie to be Lost In Translation? Shouldn't it be something more kid oriented?" The Berserker countered.

"She is pretty mature for a kid her age. When her big bad Demon Lord daddy decided to get into a five on one fight she pumped her fist and said go get em. She is no stranger fights." Romanoff discerned.

"Rin may do as she pleases." Sesshomaru settled the argument. He had not realized that the huntress had been listening to Rin so carefully, he doubted it was due to some maternal instinct.

"Alright kiddies, please put your tray tables in the upright and locked position and remain seated because we have arrived. You don't mind us setting this down on the tower do you Stark?" Barton announced in a fake voice, Sesshomaru, again ignored him.

"Nah any damages I'll just charge to Agent." Stark grinned and saw Roger roll his eyes.

Sesshomaru reflexively lengthened his claws. The sounds that reverberated in his skull were maddening in conjunction with the plane engines. He couldn't even tell what they were. Chatter, other devices, screeches and banging. He set his jaw as they landed.

As they disembarked, Jaken and Rin's eyes bugged out of their heads and Sesshomaru's blanked out. They had never seen anything like it. Sesshoumaru's ears twitched.

Cold white, yellow, red and blue lights flared both harsh and soft across horizon. Monoliths and towers stabbed straight, blunt and true from the earth. They thrusted to the sky as if to punch it for its existence.

The twilight hour made the scene look like something from the underworld, both awe inspiring and devastating at the same time. The dying sunlight refracted off the structures making them gleam as if afire.

The air smelt of tar, smoke, metal and humans. It scratched the insides of his nose and he nearly sneezed. He could hardly smell any trees, grasses, animals or fresh soil. Even the water smelled tainted. He knew his sense of smell would be nearly useless in this place, so he closed off the sense with his youki temporarily.

Where was Spring?

"Lord Sesshomaru what dreadful place is this?! We are doomed!" Jaken nearly dropped the staff of two heads. Rin stood silent, fists clenched.

'Is this why the Demons were gone? The humans had surely succeeded in corrupting and destroying this realm.' Sesshomaru maintained a face of neutrality for Rin's, Jaken's and his pride's sake, but his ears flattened.

"This is the big apple, Jaken." Sesshomaru meant for it to mock the humans, naming a city a fruit when it was clearly so unnatural, but his voice barely came out as a whisper.

"See Sailor Moon, us humans, we got our kicks. This is what the industrial revolution gets you. Clearly you guys got some catching up to do, but I can give you some manuals. Welcome to the pinnacle of five hundred years' technology and progress! And you're about to see the best part! Stark Tower!" Stark spread his arms out wide as if he owned the whole city.
Sesshomaru frowned slightly, he did not comprehend why the human needed to seem so smug.

"Lord Sesshomaru can we please go home? I promise I won't disobey Jaken anymore." Rin's eyes softened and she buried her face in Sesshomaru's pelt.

Sesshomaru, in an uncommon display of affection, placed a clawed hand gently on her head, massaging her tangled hair gently. Sesshomaru meant the words he said, but he felt his stomach knot.

"No harm will befall you in this metropolis, Rin." Sesshomaru spat out the word metropolis as a curse and his golden eyes narrowed to shards and his pupils to slits at Stark.

Stark's shoulders fell. He didn't know what Rin said but he could hedge a good bet.

"Wow Tony way to scare a little girl into tears. Is this your effect on all women or just the ones you're trying to impress?" Bedclothes admonished. Sesshomaru then realized all the muscles in his body were bow-string taught and released them one muscle group section by one.

"At least this one didn't see him shirtless!" Barton, the archer, jabbed. Thor nodded.

"C'mon guys let's show you around. It takes some getting used to but it's not that scary." Romanoff said the third sentence in Japanese and motioned to a rooftop access door.

Sesshomaru followed, not wanting to subject his senses, especially his ears, to more assault. The rest followed suit, leaving Stark on the rooftop.

"Why am I the bad guy and not the Demon Lord?!!" Was all he said as he reluctantly followed, being the last person to enter his own house.

Sesshomaru relaxed somewhat as they entered the fortress, at least until he heard a voice.

"Welcome back Miss Romanoff, Mr. Barton, Thor, Mr. Rogers and Dr. Banner. I detect three previously unidentified persons, neither listed as hostile nor friendly." Jarvis sounded and Sesshomaru immediately straightened and went to the balls of his feet.

He spread both of his arms in a protective stance for Rin and Jaken. His hands glowed a fearsome, deadly green from his toxin and his talons were long and sharp while his face remained stony. His blue youki surged like a wave and his ears lowered.

'They lured us into a trap! I sense no life presence for this voice!' Sesshomaru's instincts reflected back to battles with Naraku, wondering if he should draw Tenseiga.

"Whoa, whoa, relax. Jarvis is not going to eat you. Jarvis, classify these guys as friendlies." Stark entered the main living room and kitchen of Stark tower.

"Welcome back Sir, what should I call your companions?" Jarvis asked.

Sesshomaru had had enough of being talked about as if he was not present.

"I am Sesshomaru Lord of the Western Lands and in my consort is my retainer Jaken and my ward Rin." Sesshomaru's voice reported steadily and with cemented authority.

"Very well, welcome Lord Sesshomaru, Retainer Jaken and Lady Rin." Jarvis replied mechanically and Sesshomaru looked around, trying to identify the source of the voice.

"Do not let the Voice of Jarvis vex you Son of Taisho! He has no corporeal form!" Thor informed
and Sesshomaru retracted his claws and the toxin dissipated instantly.

"I see. He is a bodiless incarnation." Sesshomaru murmured, seemingly to himself, thinking of a certain Wind Demon.

"Yeah, OK. Let's order some pizza, please for the love of God?!" Barton called out from what appeared to be a long, plush seat.

"No onions on at least one." Bedclothes emphatically shouted.

"I want Mediterranean." The huntress, Romanoff commanded.

"I'm good for whatever." The Berserker relented.

"I request two pies with the ground boar meat!" Storm God bellowed.

'If Loki doesn't show himself this nightfall I may just fight Thor in front of all his humans until he does.' Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and lowered his ears.

"Sure, call the usual pizza places. Oh Sailor Moon, you probably don't know pizza but you're going to love it." Tony flashed a smile, in a weak peace keeping attempt.

"I do not consume human fare. Rin, you may only eat whatever Storm God eats." Sesshomaru reassured and she nodded resolutely. Rogers looked like he gave up in being trusted.

"Yes Lord Sesshomaru!" Rin all but saluted. Sesshomaru turned to leave.

"Jaken, Storm God, I leave Rin in your care. Do not disappoint this Sesshomaru." Sesshomaru's voice held a dark, veiled warning as he glanced over the luxurious accommodations.

"Wait. Where you going? We were just about to start the party!" Stark inquired and Sesshomaru turned to the group of humans who watched him carefully.

'This test will determine if they are genuine in their regard to welcome me as an equal, or try to contain me a foe.' Sesshomaru swished back, his hair fanning out slightly in the climate controlled apartment.

"I will be return within a human hour." Sesshomaru's voice fell like a curtain and in a rush he was out the way he came.

Sesshomaru needed space and to scout. Regardless if it meant torturing his taxed eardrums to more cacophonous noise. His long, lean legs led him out to the roof where the metal bird, believed to be named Quinjet, rested.

He ignored it and with a graceful leap he front-flipped into the air, his silver hair swirled all around him.

Though he couldn't make out specific sounds very well, he could hear the overall din of humans exercising all sorts of liberties in the cooling air. There were so many, he had never thought humans would build on top of each other like insects would.

He rebounded swiftly off the side of one structure, noting that the side was made of the same transparent crystal the front of the plane was.

He ran. The wind whipped by him like a current of rapids.
'Kagura, does your spirit still live? Do you still linger here after so many Demons have left?'
Sesshomaru closed his eyes as he ran perpendicular to the side of the building, leaping again into the air, almost as a cartwheel to a neighboring skyscraper.

He would appear as nothing but perhaps a white and silver blur to the human eye, using around seventy percent of his top speed. He followed the scant scent of trees, eyes closed.

He rebounded off the side of the nameless structure he sprinted down and again back-flipped onto the top of an abnormally tall skyscraper.

'At least these buildings make an easy way to bound about, better than trees.' Sesshomaru attempted to find a silver lining in the despoiled realm he found himself in

Sesshomaru gazed out, examining the rancid river and the salty ocean. He saw a green statue of someone of great acclaim and wondered absently if his father's grave still held true. Most likely not if humans had turned his lands into something similar to his.

He sprang again, enticing the wind to billow the sleeves of his yukata and fan his hair. He gazed at the dead earth far down below him and wondered if the cost was worth it. He knew Rin would miss the flowers, the grasses and the green. He did as well; the grey was disappointing.

Recoiling again onto another tall monolith this time using the full strength of his legs he rocketed into the air.

'Humans and their itch for conquest. Their insatiable thirst for more. They are not so unlike the Demons they scorn.' Sesshomaru in a vain, artistic show of power in mid backflip, back arched towards the heavens, unleashed an unabashedly wide shock wave of shimmering blue youki far above the city.

It washed most of Manhattan, including Stark Tower, for the briefest of moments, in an ice blue glory in the throes of sunset. His youki settled down through the air like glimmering flurries. Sesshomaru allowed himself a brief smile as he set his trap.

"I shall not be intimidated by your industrial revolution." Sesshomaru finished his flip and planted firmly on another high structure's pole, this one scalloped in its edges and design.

He stood for countless moments, Tenseiga humming. Waiting for a challenge on his claim. Perhaps a territorial Demon would emerge, or another metal bird. Sesshomaru scowled slightly in disappointment when no one appeared.

'This...putrid metropolis appears to be an economic not militaristic stronghold.' Sesshomaru leapt again, continuing to scout the area for threats and found none.

He finally, he decided to unleash his sense of smell again and circled back to the trees and pounced down from his perch like a javelin, Sesshomaru, out of all the unfamiliar smells, caught whiff of a familiar prey. Deer. Sesshomaru had a plan.

Within seconds the game was his, and with his fur pelt coiled tightly around the carcass, he slashed down an armful of branches, still mostly inert from winter. He returned to the odd tower, sailing with an elegance that had been missing from this realm for a long time.

Placing the deer on the roof, near the Quinjet, he arranged the branches, cleaned the kindling from them, and with a spark of youki lit a roaring fire.

As he waited for the fire to die down, he knelt down and expertly cleaned the deer with his
elongated talons, sharpening one femur to a deadly point. Rin would need to feel safe in this realm, he would provide her that.

"Lord Sesshomaru! What fine venison you have prepared. I have our spices!" Jaken waddled up, the most excited he had been all day. Sesshomaru felt at ease, despite his ears thrumming. It was good fortune their food spices were on Jaken's person when the magic gate appeared.

He gave Jaken a femur bone and instructed him to wash it with the staff of two heads. He then licked it, sealing it like resin, hardening it.

He wasn't the only one who followed suit up to the roof. Sesshomaru's eyebrows raised, his plan going into motion.

"You went hunting without me Fancy Pants?! That's treasonous. If I get plates do I get some?" Sesshomaru's eyes went wide as Barton the archer approached. He had not expected the archer to consider him in such a familiar light.

Perhaps the archer liked venison.

"I shall share in my bounty if you provide those." Sesshomaru nodded once, there was more than enough to share between three people, of that Sesshomaru made sure.

"Sweet. Haven't had fresh venison in ages, nice cleaning job by the way." Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow as Barton loped down the stairs of the roof access.

'Loki has peculiar tastes in lovers indeed.' Hummed Sesshomaru as he watched Jaken spice and prepare the steaks and skewer them. Sesshomaru preferred his mostly raw, and Jaken preferred his rare.

"Ok, you can't just light fires on the top of my house. There are things called the fire department, and like, manners." Stark bounded up the stairs followed by Rin, Romanoff, Bedclothes and the Berserker.

"Fire is only dangerous in the hands of the weak and inexperienced." Sesshomaru instructed, ignoring the humans as turned back towards the steaks.

"Tell that to smokey the bear." Bedclothes joked good naturedly. Sesshomaru knew of no bears who would care about fire. 'I sensed no bear Demons in this region, perhaps he is a Demon of some renown.' Sesshomaru mused as he picked up the bone.

"Come Rin I have prepared for you a present." Rin skipped forward and gave her the washed and sealed femur. Rin gleefully swung the bone which was about as tall as she was.

"I'll train with Jaken every day! Thank you Lord Sesshomaru!" Rin smiled, picking it up and stroking it through the air.

"And I thought modern parenting was a tad bizarre." Roger's eyebrows went to his forehead. The others looked a bit amused.

"I may not have slain enough flesh for you all. The archer Barton has already staked a claim by procuring plates." Sesshomaru's face and especially his eyes looked feral and glorious in the firelight. Sesshomaru knew the statement was misleading, it was important to promote scarcity in his prize.

"I guess I'll get drinks and cups." The Berserker, shockingly, was first on the bandwagon as Barton
jumped back into view with a few plates.

"Gah you buzzards! You already had your choice of pizza!" Barton, indignant, marched over to Sesshomaru, set down the plates, and picked up a smaller steak as the Berserker slipped back down to the penthouse.

"What is this?! West Virginia?! Are we all going to start singing Wagonwheel? Steve you have a guitar right? Where did you even get a deer? And what was with the light show over Manhattan?! You've turned my tower upside down and you haven't even been here two hours!" Stark gestured exasperatingly and huffed. Jaken rose.

"How dare you question my Lord Sesshomaru so?! He has done nothing but agree to your moronic terms! That blue youki was a proximity barrier! If any powerful foe enters its radius we will know!" Jaken sputtered with anger as he speared his own steak and began to cook it.

Pause.

"Yeah. Well. We have Jarvis for that. And I doubt he did it for our benefit." Stark bit back, Sesshomaru noted he didn't appreciate Jaken.

"Nifty backflip there Pretty Boy." Romanoff walked over to Rin, helping her with her form on the large bone. Odd woman human, but she is adept at fighting, Rin would do well to take notes from her.

"Hey, so instead of beer, Thor decided to grab a bunch of liquor. I managed to convince him to get some chaser at least." the Berserker shrugged, holding gin, scotch, and tequila, while Thor held bourbon, run, vodka and the shot glasses. Sesshomaru caught the sharp snapping smell of human spirits.

Sesshomaru nearly, nearly, flashed his fangs in his victory. It was all too easy to lure these humans to imbibe, especially with Thor to goad them on. He allowed the Berserker a steak from his game, but insured he sat between him and Rin.

"Hey, this is actually pretty good, what spices are these...oh man, you know what I'm probably better off not knowing if they're like Demon spices. Forget I asked." The Berserker back peddled and Barton next to him pat him on the back.

"Ignorance is bliss my friend, maybe you should aim for less knowledge." Barton jabbed, Bruce soured at the joke.

"Thanks, Clint. noted." Bruce gave a thumbs up.

Sesshomaru watched as the humans settled around him, drinking, smiling, laughing and making merry. He sent Rin to bed, along with Jaken, both of them exhausted. He partook in the drink called gin, but due to the natural detoxing abilities of his blood, could not get drunk.

"Gin?! Really?! Ugh you would it's such like an aristocratic villain drink. You'd probably also drive a Jaguar, with that British commercial and everything." Stark's words were a bit slurred. Sesshoumaru darted his gaze his way, Stark amused him somewhat, he seemed perhaps to be the most intelligent, if not most confusing of the humans he had met thus far. He was the only human he saw so far capable of flight, which had to mean something.

"Aye, Son of Taisho is indeed an aristocrat! His lands are located in what the mortals refer now as Japan." Thor explained, which suited him because Sesshomaru loathed explaining himself to others, especially any humans.
'Japan, I will have to remember that name. I am curious to learn of what has become of my lands in this time, and how to prevent this metropolis from happening to them when I return to my time. Perhaps that incarnation Jarvis may know of where to find the information I seek.' Sesshomaru's mind cycled through thought after thought. He also had to find out what Stark meant by 'manual' when he showed him his tower upon arriving. He had a feeling these manuals would be imperative to study the new realm he found himself in currently.

"The kimono and Japanese girl from Japan? Really now?" Barton smirked.

"Son of Taisho! Regale us with a story! I have heard many from my fellow Avengers but not many from you! One of you and Loki would be most delightful!" Thor smiled genuinely and Sesshomaru was caught off guard. Thor knew, Sesshomaru was most certain, that he was not a bard, and did not spin stories. He would sit and listen to Thor's and Loki's, they were much more talented than he and liked it better.

'Loki did abduct me and bring me to this terrible place. Perhaps I can retaliate some with some unflattering knowledge about his person. It may even provoke him to come more swiftly.' Sesshomaru paused, and his eyes lit up devilishly, but his face remained stoic.

"Once while treasure questing, Loki was turned into a purple stag by a Vanir." Sesshomaru's even, placid voice carried over the crackling fire and his ears lifted slightly.

That got laughs around the fire. Sesshomaru stayed silent, not sure what to do next, was he supposed to continue? Sesshomaru was not one for occasions such as these.

"The Vanir's objective was to coerce me to into obtaining the treasure for him so I would barter with him to return Loki." Sesshomaru noticed Thor's eyes never left him, he never received such attention from the Storm God in the past. It confused Sesshomaru. Thor usually regarded him minimally, unless in combat or pressed by Loki. Perhaps some form of nostalgia? It had been over five hundred years for the Storm God, but only about fifty-three for him.

"But Loki is a shape-shifter, couldn't he just turn back?" Bedclothes asked, enraptured in the story.

"A sorcerer cannot change out of something he did not change into." Thor explained, a warm, nostalgic smile on his face.

"You know, that so explains the horns. Stags have antlers, he just is throwing back to a previous look is all. Vintage Bambi works!" Stark prompted, dark eyes lit warmly by the tequila he drank and the fire he sat next to. Sesshomaru could tell because Stark sat next to him.

"So, I assume you bartered right?" The Berserker prompted, his words also slurring slightly from the bourbon. He showed no signs of agitation which proved well.

"This Sesshomaru does no dirty work. I informed some fae of the treasure and of its intended plunderer. They sought out the Vanir, who persuaded him to return Loki." Sesshomaru explained, voice cool and crisp.

"I'm gonna go ahead and guess that their methods of persuasion weren't asking nicely." Romanoff laughed, cheeks flushed from vodka

Sesshomaru merely opened his mouth to show his lengthened fangs and took another sip of gin, he noticed all the eyes were still curiously on him.

"Well, deer hunter, did you and your deer get the treasure?" Barton all the sudden spoke up loudly.
"We emerged victorious. I neglected to inform the fae them of the treasure's exact location. While the fae searched nearby, we collected the treasure and continued on." Sesshomaru's eyes glowed. It would be one of this favorite stories to tell, if he told stories ever again. Something told Sesshomaru if he continued to be in the presence of these humans, they would attempt another bout out of him.

"It is good to hear of stories of such humorous stories about my brother from another time Son of Taisho. You and he seemed to always have such peculiar adventures. They differed greatly than the ones we did together." Thor, despite the alcohol, sounded melancholy noted Sesshomaru.

'Something odd has certainly transpired between the brothers and caused a great rift. Perhaps there is good reason yet Loki has summoned me to this realm.' The fireside fell silent for a moment then Stark yapped about something else, but Sesshomaru remained deep in thought.

The humans and Storm God hours later, inebriated and happy, all filtered down to their respected rooms. He scouted the tower, finding a suitable quarters and with Rin and Jaken safely tucked away in the quarters in his pelt, he waited for Loki to spring his Youki trap.

And at 3:49 am. He did.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading!

"Wuh?" Tony flopped onto his stomach and looked at the time on the alarm clock Pepper bought him, but never actually set: 3:55 am. Tony grunted, not amused.

"Jarvis why... what is going on?" Tony groggily questioned, rubbing his whole face with his hand, the tequila still hampering his movements. While fun, he should have left tequila shots in college. He should have left a lot in college, like most drinking games, but it didn't stop him from time to time.

"You informed me to let you know if Loki, God of Mischief, ever appeared. He has been on the roof with Lord Sesshomaru now for approximately 5 minutes and 42 seconds. I was shielded from his magic due to unknown interference from Lord Sesshomaru's own energy." Jarvis informed and Tony nodded. That made sense, Coachella did need to talk to him after all.

'I gotta ask him about that purple deer story, his damn head will spin off his neck. Heh. Reindeer, so perfect!' Tony curled back up to go back to a sleep he sorely needed.

Wait. What.

Tony barrel rolled out of bed, banging his knee against the floor, cursing loudly. Loki is here. On his balcony. He had to get his suit, he had to tell someone. Not Pepper, she'd probably kill him or blame him. He didn't even tell her about Sailor Moon yet.

"Jarvis, bring up full audio and visuals for the roof. Does anyone else know he is here?!" Tony leapt up, tugging on red sweatpants. 'This is insane. I need to find Bruce so he can fling Loki around again.' Tony began to hop, trying to get his leg through one of the legs of his sweatpants.

"Just me." Answered Natasha from the shadows. Tony fell down, knocking over the alarm clock with a plastic crash.

"Is everyone trying to give me a heart attack?!" Tony jumped out of skin and Natasha smirked as Jarvis brought up the video and audio feed of the roof. Who watches people sleep like that? She is more terrifying than the Demon Lord.

"It wouldn't be that hard. When was the last time you seriously did cardio?" Nat approached the bed and Tony refused to acknowledge that question.

"You look still sober! How did you know this would happen?" Tony thought his speech was still slurring, and he was probably right. Stupid fucking tequila, Tony swore he would get Thor back for this. See if Point Break ever eats another pop tart in this tower.

"It was a ploy I would use. This Pretty Boy certainly knows how get what he wants." She pointed at the screen at a high definition figure who was most assuredly was Loki, opposite him stood Sesshomaru. Tony's jaw dropped. They were in such shit.

"How. How did this happen?" Tony, flabbergasted yelled and Natasha slapped a hand over his
mouth. What is she doing?! We need to call ghostbusters or something. Dog the Bounty hunter?

"Let's watch." Natasha advised, voice clear and eyes lit a bit roguish.

'Fine Tasha. Have it your way, but if Loki goes Helter Skelter with the Samurai Demon Lord, I am so throwing you under the bus' Tony thought, but didn't dare voice because he was certain she could probably strangle him with her hair.

"I knew what your brother spoke was folly. Assuredly, no cell could keep you." Sesshomaru's cool voice sounded almost sinister over Jarvis' speakers. He didn't look particularly happy to see his old LARPing buddy.

"Quite true being that I am a sorcerer. However, Thor is no brother of mine. Much has changed since we last saw each other five hundred and fifty years ago." Loki looked pale, and out of breath and with that comment Sesshomaru was upon him, clawed hand over throat, forcing him to the concrete roof of the helipad with a hollow thud. Yikes. This is how he treated his friends?

"Enough senseless ego stroking Loki! Explain yourself!" Sesshomaru seethed, toxin dripping. His blue youki pulsed out like ripples.

'Damn, if he kills Loki, do I still have to call Fury? Better yet, how could I make money off of a Pay Per View fight, Storm God vs Sailor Moon?' Tony winced at the scene, almost feeling bad for Loki. Almost.

"I got $100 on Hermione." Natasha slapped two fifties on the bed. Did she seriously just read his mind? She is too scary.

"Deal." Tony responded, already sort of regretting the bet. Should have bet on Sailor Moon, she fights evil by moonlight after all. Best nickname ever, rivals Point Break.

"I tricked Odin." Wheezed Loki. "I reminded him about our gift to your father." Loki finally managed to teleport to the other side of the helipad, hand at his smoking throat. Damn, he looks like got dragged behind a pickup truck before he got here.

"Gift?" Sesshomaru's voice and retained an even, cold pallor as his whip flashed.

"The hilt of your katana. The azure one." Loki looked like he could have rolled his eyes as he healed his neck. "My father and I crafted and enchanted the hilt for your father as a gift for you. I did most of the work, but back then my sealing spells were insufficient and I needed Odin's aid to perfect it." Loki explained, pointed, hand trembling like he had just ran a three-minute mile.

They circled like lions around the extinguished fire and empty liquor bottles.

"Tenseiga...He is fashioned from your hand?!" Sesshomaru's eyes looked down at the sword as if it betrayed him and fortified him in the same breath. Sesshomaru's blue youki throttled up in strength. Oh, so Loki helped him make his sword?

"Now you're finally catching on. Your father, I can gather, fell before properly explaining the reasoning behind giving you that weapon. It was blessed by the divine, intended to protect its wielder and guide him." Loki increased his forest green magic output to defend against the ice blue youki.

'Yeah, guide him into almost turning me into a pegleg and setting my roof on fire.' Tony rubbed his eyes.
"He fell before properly doing a great many things." Sesshomaru murmured.

"Oh, point to Loki for bringing up daddy issues?" Tony commented with a snarky tone.

"Only if the earlier throat slam puts us even." Natasha negotiated.

"...should we be telling anyone about this?" Tony asked hesitantly. This was the point of no return, so far they were talking about Valentines day gifts. The time to strike was now.

"Not at the moment. What would we do anyway other than just spook Loki? I want to see how things play out, something tells me there is something big going on here." Natasha sighed through her nose, her blue eyes searching the screen.

"Oh what tangled webs we weave dear friend. Your father crafted the tang and the blade of the katana, and rumors clamored around Asgard as to what your father managed to create with the divinely blessed hilt. The most outrageous rumor being that the enchanted blade could resurrect the dead. What madness to craft a weapon that humans would squabble over indefinitely! They'd stop at nothing to possess it!" Loki chuckled to himself. And Natasha noticed a corner of Sesshomaru's mouth slice into a thin smirk.

"Oh yeah, because that makes sense, a sword that can bring people back to life in the hands of a murderous Demon Lord, couldn't write irony better." Tony looked around for ibuprofen.

"I, over the course of months, then convinced Odin that we need to retrieve the katana so I could revive the souls of those who had been slain when I attacked this realm." Loki and Sesshomaru still circled warily.

"But you do not covet my birthright. Do you Mischief God?" Sesshomaru chose his words slowly and carefully.

"Of course not. I know those rumors to be but tall tales of people who know not of true weapons crafting. You asked how you came to be in this realm and I answered you: by way of Odin's magic and the Bifrost, which is currently inoperable due to its strain to bring you to this time." Loki tried to look as bored as Sesshomaru, but he looked too eager to speak.

"So that's why Thor couldn't contact Heimdall." Natasha mused.

"Your distant realm magic has always been unreliable." Sesshomaru looked every bit like a baiting predator.

A bolt of magic and a crack of a whip later they seemed to have not moved an inch.

"Shots fired, literally. Did Loki ever move that fast when we fought him?" Tony asked and Natasha shook her head, focused intently on the screen.

"Jarvis prevent this from going to SHIELD." Tony ordered. This was getting strange.

"You wouldn't sound so arrogant if you knew that the only way to send you back to your proper time is with the Bifrost, and with my magic. Odin won't do it a second time knowing I tricked him." Loki spat and time froze.

In a sliver of a second Sesshomaru's whip was tangled around Loki's neck and with a graceful arc of his body he brought a weakened Loki to his knees. Sesshomaru's face betrayed no emotion.

"Point to Hermione." Natasha held up two fingers.
"It's creepy how he can look like he just snorted a bottle of Xanax after doing that to someone." Tony crossed his arms.

"It's impressive. His tells are locked down." Natasha admitted, lounging down on Tony's bed.

"You know his tells?!" Tony asked incredulously.

"Not yet, speculation mostly. He hasn't lied to us. He is hiding a lot for sure, but I haven't caught him in a single lie." Natasha scrunched her nose.

"I once knew to you to be someone whom embodied intellect and respected honor." Sesshomaruu's tone was icy and silken as he pulled up on his acid green whip, Loki scrabbled on the cement, one hand on the whip, the other trying to grab purchase.

"What do you think he is hiding from us? Horns?" Tony slurred, still a bit drunk.

"He went easy on us in our skirmish. Think about it. His whip corrodes through metal, but he didn't attack Clint, Bruce, or I with it. And he went only for Steve's shield. Additionally, you saw how quickly he went to Rin's side when she had fainted, and a few hours ago when he laid his Loki trap. His speed is incredible, and he didn't use his full speed on any of us. He is probably also hiding his true relationship with Loki." Natasha surmised and Tony blinked a few times.

"Huh. Think they met on grindr?" Tony flopped on his back on his bed and both Natasha and Tony chuckled.

"Do you think I would not have sought your aid if I were not truly desperate?" Loki choked out, making a crude gargling noise and Sesshomaruu let up on his whip.

"Desperate? Thor and his naive friends believe you a captive of Asgard's justice yet you retain the ability flit freely from realm to realm even with no magic gate." Sesshomaruu approached his friend and looked down on him, scraping together healing magic for his wounds at a delayed rate.

Sesshomaruu, boldly, squatted down next to the collapsed God.

"I was correct, you are enfeebled and injured. Asgardian justice must not treat its prisoners with due decorum." Sesshomaruu noted, his silver hair blew in the wind, covering his face and brushing Loki's gaunt one.

"Oh Shawarma, things just got complicated." Tony groaned, coming to a chest hitching realization. Natasha eyed him.

"Do you get it? Loki has been rotting in Asgard's prison for almost three years right? Thor would be all over it if Loki escaped. He just proved Loki could escape at any time. Sailor Moon never had the ability to control Loki, he just used their history to convince him to come to him, or Loki meant to find him on Earth once Odin brought him here." Tony sat up straight and Natasha followed suit.

"If he was being treated to enhanced interrogation techniques, it meant it meant he bent to them willingly." Natasha's eyes darted and she pursed her full lips.

"Why would he? And why would he come back to the scene of the crime?" Tony gazed, transfixed at the screen.

"It was nothing I didn't deserve." Jarvis had a hard time picking up Loki's whisper as he sat up for his emerald eyes to meet Sesshomaruu's golden ones. Tony swore he saw a softness in the Demon Lord, he would go back and re-watch this scene later.
"...self-deprecation is unlike you Loki. You will tell this Sesshomaru what caused these series of events." Sesshomaru's voice sounded less harsh, more like velvet. Loki collected himself some, and Sesshomaru placed a hand under his upper arm, as if to help him up.

"I fell from grace old friend. There is much to explain. In the end, I was commanded to conduct an invasion on Midgard from a most...convincing Lord." Loki rasped out, the green healing magic began to finish, and it dissipated into the air.

"You confess you seek sovereignty of this realm when you and your kin professed to my father and I, that you would never do so?" Sesshomaru stood up offended, leaving Loki on the cement surface of the helipad.

"Never. I never desired to rule Midgard. I mean to confess that I was not strong enough at the time to do what needed to done and destroy the ones that used me." Loki stood up, and Tony realized then just how thin and pale he looked while retaining the clarity in his green eyes.

"Hmmm." Natasha furrowed her eyebrows.

"What?" Tony looked over to her.

"He is the God of lies, I know, but I've read him before, and that didn't look like a lie." Natasha examined.

"Used you?" Sesshomaru asked automatically.

"It matters not. What matters is that I have knowledge that the ones who commanded me to invade Midgard did not give up. The rest of their fleet were three years out from Midgard when I made my appearance. They mean to obliterate all life on this planet, and then move on to Asgard." Loki clutched his fists and his obsidian magic flared pushing Sesshomaru back.

"No one. No one would believe the God of lies, of trickery and mischief. I do not blame them, though I am disappointed they think that invasion attempt my best effort." Loki continued, laughing bitterly.

"Nat. Nat. I need your polygraph like now. If what Loki is saying is true, then we are three months out, tops." Tony shoved her shoulder but she didn't move.

"I made the only play I could. I called upon the only person who would believe me, and would have the strategic mind to prevent annihilation of both our homes. I called upon an old friend." Loki gestured to Sesshomaru whose eyes widened a bit.

Pause.

"I have lost all credibility, even my own mother looks upon me with distrust." Loki looked down, his dark hair hiding the sides of his face. Tony then noticed he was wearing a simple green linen shirt and black pants. No armor.

'He really isn't here to start a party. He would have at least put on his party helmet.' Tony felt a headache form and knew he had ibuprofen in his room somewhere.

"Tony. I can't make this kind of call on my own. I don't envy Pretty Boy out there though. He doesn't even have all of the facts. He doesn't even know anything about the Tesseract, mind control or how mental Loki was." Natasha felt her pulse race.

"Loki you request much of this Sesshomaru." Sesshomaru's voice sounded thinner than usual and
he shifted on the helipad.

"Yeah, no kidding he is requesting a lot from you. You chose the wrong brother to be bros with. All Point Break requests is alcohol and stories." Tony finally found ibuprofen in his bedside table, probably Pepper again. He took four.

Natasha pointed to Tony as to say 'truth'.

"I can reward you amply. After the Bifrost recharges I can send you back to your time. I can give you access to travel the nine realms; I know when we were close you spoke endlessly of your affinity for travel." Loki backpeddled, gesturing wildly, practically begging.

"Though alluring, that was not this Sesshomaru implied." Sesshomaru took a step closer, and arm's length away, but did not stand threateningly. Sesshomaru turned away from Loki, looking off camera.

"They will believe me biased. They also think me slow of mind being from my time. Before this revolution of industry." Jarvis had a hard time picking up Sesshomaru's explanation.

"Not true!" Tony almost yelled at the screen and Natasha tilted her head to the side.

"About the slow of mind thing." Tony scratched the back of his neck.

"You like to remind him of it." Nat chided.

"Even if I can devise a strategy to prevent this armada from scorching this realm asunder, it will fall on deaf ears. This Sesshomaru will not waste his time." Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and toxin dripped to the concrete, sizzling craters in it, he turned back towards Loki, his expression still unreadable.

"They will harken to you. You can prove that I meant for my invasion to fail. That will catalyze the Avengers; they will have to take this threat seriously." Loki put his palms out like he was a set of scales. Tony's eyes shot up.

"He wants his best friend to convince his enemy he lost to them on purpose? He really is insane, and Sailor Moon needs better friends." Tony mumbled, Nat's eyes widened and she jutted her head back in an 'hopefully not us' reaction.

"And if that is not enough?" Sesshomaru retracted his claws.

"Then I have a backup plan. But I think you are missing the bigger picture, have faith in your abilities, and the opportunity it presents." Loki's smiled turned into a cold sickle.

"Opportunity? There seems to be little in recompense for this Sesshomaru." Sesshomaru's typically neutral tone turned a bit haughty.

'Ah, finally catching on to the fact Loki is being a bit more demanding than the board of directors of Stark Enterprises.' Tony thought.

"The commander of this fleet is renowned throughout galaxies for being one of the strongest beings. He is known by the moniker the Mad Titan and few would dare stand up to him. His right hand, The Other, is a tremendously strong sorcerer as well, though I would prefer to put his head on a pike myself." Loki tapped the tips of all his fingers together a few times.

"This Sesshomaru enjoys a challenge." Sesshomaru looked to the heavens.
"Ah. That's his deal. He gets his rocks off dueling people." Tony fist pumped in victory.

"Oh yes, I do remember a certain Dark Elf and his friends challenged you once. He threw you in a lake." Loki relaxed minutely. And Sesshomaru squared his shoulders. "I am surprised no one has come to greet us yet, this bodes well." Loki looked around.

"...this Sesshomaru may have set certain events in motion to compel the Storm God and his friends to imbibe unduly much of their human spirits." Sesshomaru blinked innocently and Loki laughed a rich, open laugh.

"...That scheming Demon Lord...Did Loki just laugh like people?!!" Tony leaned back. Natasha shrugged in a 'I guess so.' motion.

"By the nine Sesshomaru, you threw a party?! Figures Thor would forget you can't become inebriated." Loki raked a thin hand through his lank hair to straighten it.

"Furthermore, I do think none of his consort believed me when I said you would arrive." Sesshomaru's voice hinted a smirk his face did no show.

"How foolhardy, however, in this realm and especially on this tower we were most certainly being recorded. In fact, I am sure Stark's AI awoke him. It is a testament to his discretion he didn't don his suit and interrupt us." Loki put a hand on his hip.

"You were totally going to do that." Natasha attacked.

"Was not. Ok. Maybe a little." Tony confessed.

"I thought this conversation private. At least they witnessed my victory. Most likely the sly huntress or the strange Berserker stopped him." Sesshomaru guessed and began to walk off the helipad.

"You met the Berserker? He is not fond of me." Loki scrunched his straight nose.

"He is curious of me when I disciplined him. Come, you need rest, and I need quiet, I scouted a suitable room in the cellar of this tower." Sesshomaru waved Loki onward and they went off screen.

"Jarvis what room is Coachella talking about?" Tony asked.

"I believe Lord Sesshomaru is speaking of substorage room 3-b in the basement. He was there earlier, Lady Rin and Retainer Jaken are currently asleep there." Tony threw up his arms.

"I have all these nice rooms and he goes for substorage room 3-b." Tony muttered, then thought of an idea.

"Why hoping he'd bunk with you?" Natasha elbowed him and Tony rolled his eyes.

"Victory...Hey Jarvis you said they were on the roof for like five minutes before you woke me up, bring up that footage." Tony put a hand to his mouth and Jarvis brought up the footage for them both.

Sesshomaru stood and in a puff of dark green smoke Loki appeared, staggering to stand equally as tall.

And then it began. Loki drew his uru daggers and Sesshomaru his whip. They charged each other,
green magic crackling against blue youki, negating them both into teal glimmers.

Sesshomaru took to the air and twisted down, his whip flaring out like a spiral. Loki turned to dodge and sniped at him with a quick green bolt of magic when he landed. Sesshomaru darted to the left so swiftly he left an afterimage, closing the gap and striking Loki with talons extended. Loki parried expertly with his left dagger, and counterattacked with the right, dagger extended like a saber for longer range. Sesshomaru evaded, neatly spinning his back towards Loki only to complete the spin with another strike of his right claws.

Loki blocked with a force feld and Sesshomaru responded in kind with his own youki, dissolving them both into teal dust. Loki responded by switching the grip on his daggers from a saber style, to a reverse one for short range, aiming to take advantage of Sesshomaru's stance beside him by bringing his blade down with tremendous force. Sesshomaru, seeing this, slipped back increasing their distance, gathering his whip and lashed out for Loki's chest.

Simultaneously as the whip shot through the hair, Loki swept his dagger out, slicing down the whip strike and jumping as the neon green whip shot back up, cracking in the air, missing Loki by a hairsbreath.

In the same instant they jumped back and circled again.

Loki this time teleported and Sesshomaru dropped as Loki appeared next to him, dagger slicing air where his head just occupied. Sesshomaru, in a crouch, struck out his talons to Loki's unprotected midsection and Loki just managed to parry the strike with his other dagger. Loki switched his grip again on the daggers playfully back to saber style and Sesshomaru waved his youki back at him, taunting him.

Flash crack!

A bolt of magic slapped out of existence by a last minute whip flick.

Their fight demonstrated graceful, precise flicks of glinting metal or loping, swooping loops of verdant green. Their movements were so swift at most points Tony had to ask Jarvis to slow down the frame rate. Sesshomaru seemed to predict where Loki would teleport to next and Loki appeared to have memorized every inch of the acid whips' trajectory. Loki every so often would shoot magic flares which were met with a wall of youki. Sesshomaru would try to come down with his claws only to be parried by a shining dagger.

Their movements complimented each other, almost like it was choreographed. It was haunting. Natasha and Tony commented on their form during the five minutes.

The fight ended when Loki fatigued prematurely, out of breath and energy, and Sesshomaru slid behind him to place a claw at his neck.

"Point." Sesshomaru looked like he was fighting boredom as he looked down at Loki with gold eyes cold.

"I concede victory. Welcome back Sesshomaru." Loki gasped, taking in heaps of air then Sesshomaru moved in front of him. The footage stopped.

Pause.

"What. Since when does Loki know how to fight like that? I doubt he learned that in Asgardian Prison Bible Study! And like, this is him injured?" Tony put his head in hands and Natasha remained silent, fist over her mouth.
"You don't learn to spar with a partner like that instantaneously. They could read each other, they had rhythm, they've done this countless times. Loki has been able to fight like that, or most likely better for...well over five hundred years." Natasha admitted, voice distant.

"I just can't believe any of this. We have to figure this out." Tony groaned, baffled and exhausted.

'This doesn't make any sense. Up until this point we knew who the bad guys were. We have a damn list! Leave it to the God of Mischief and his bored Demon friend to upend that. What were we supposed to do now? Clint's going to burst a vein. Thor will probably try to take him back to Asgard, which worked so well the first time. I better give Bruce a Valium or something. Steve will probably get on his high horse and demand a trial. Oh, and it's not like Fury, Hill and Agent aren't coming by tomorrow to meet a Demon Lord who is currently hiding SHIELD's most wanted in substorage room 3-b. This is what I get for developing a magic signature locator for Loki's energy. I was having such a good month too. Crap, I better call Pepper.' Tony put his fingers to his forehead.

"Get some sleep Tony we have a hell of a day tomorrow. Oh and you owe me that $100." Natasha picked up her two fifty dollars bills and sauntered out of the room.

"…I should have just called Ghostbusters, or Agent." Tony fell backwards on the bed, reaching for his phone to call Pepper while commanding Jarvis to sequester that and any other footage of Loki.

They had an invasion to prevent, and a planet to convince. He just hoped Pepper didn't quit.
Morning came too soon for a groggy Loki.

At the time, Loki had not understood why Sesshomaru had chosen a storage room of all places for solace, it was like going from one cell to another! Yet, when he observed him, he noticed his ears were slightly red and twitching.

This city must be abhorrent on his dog Demon senses; no doubt Thor did not think of it.

As it always did, Sesshomaru's face betrayed little of his emotions or intentions. He learned over their somewhat clandestine friendship to read his body more than his face. His ears twitching, his knuckles cracking, his talons lengthening, posture and so on.

Loki didn't have to know Sesshomaru's tells because he never really lied. Lies by omission sure, but never outright falsehoods. He would know, being the God of lies of course.

Surely it was a remarkable thing that the God of tricks, mischief and lies fell into such a neat friendship with a mostly serious, studious and murderous Demon Lord.

He never, even with the power of the Odinforce, thought he could successfully bring Sesshomaru to this time. The only reason he could calculate was that the enchanted sword Tenseiga somehow aided him as a lay line. He sensed its magic, his own magic rather, from Midgard the moment he arrived in that awful wasteland of New Mexico. Loki had to assume that the reason Sesshomaru ended up in New Mexico was because it was a strong point of reference for the Bifrost being that the Warriors Three landed there recently.

Loki knew he threatened Sesshomaru's livelihood in bringing him to his realm, he could have been killed, but he had underestimated Sesshomaru before and was left wanting. So he undertook the deception of Odin to bring him here. Loki had wished Asgard, or at least his mother heeded his words of the eminent invasion, but it was all for naught. He knew the only way to save the realms was to bring Sesshomaru here, the only person who would hear him out impartially.

Loki knew also the Avengers would most likely investigate the site of the Bifrost, what he didn't predict was Tenseiga pinging with his magic. Loki feared Sesshomaru may have taken out at least a few of the 'Lost Creatures' before having to contend with Thor and the Berserker. Loki shuddered at what the Hulk did to him still, but knew Sesshomaru would have escaped a similar fate.

Good fortune always seemed to shine down on Sesshomaru. That and Sesshomaru, a bit more cautious than Loki gave him credit for, did not slay any of the Avengers, not even that brazen Stark. He didn't expect them all to be unscathed from their battle either.

He also never expected that Sesshomaru would have roasted a doe and had gotten the all Avengers impaired on the top of Stark Tower but there was something to be said for the mysterious Demon Lord.

And humans loved a good mystery.

Loki could feel his internal injuries heal and his magic began to build back up. Even though he
slept, he could feel the Demon Lord had stood vigilant the entire time knowing he was too pained and weak to put up much of a resistance to the group of Avengers, had they been rallied and come down to ambush them.

Loki would have handed himself over willingly if he thought Sesshomaru would be taken captive by SHIELD. Loki, quite certainly knew that there was not much that SHIELD could do to him that Asgard and the Other had not already done.

He would never breathe a word of the abysmal treatment Asgard gave him, and that the only reason for him being this healed was that Odin truly believed in the lore of Sesshomaru's Tenseiga.

'What a fool to believe in such a maiden's tale about the sword. And while Odin once held a certain favor for Sesshomaru, he is no doubt displeased at the turn of events.' Loki stretched on the concrete floor, working his abused muscles around, flexing blood into them.

So when a few of his ribs, right clavicle, right tibia, and a few vertebrae were broken again in retaliation among other things in his lower body, Loki knew it was time to make an exit, stage right, waiting till far early in the human morning to make his appearance at Stark Tower.

Even with his glamour camouflaging his bruises and lacerations, Loki knew Sesshomaru knew he received poor treatment. Loki could rarely fool Sesshomaru, and mostly refrained from attempting it.

'Speak of the Demon, and he appears!' Sesshomaru returned to their quarters, shadowed by the girl who Loki found sleeping down in the quarters, and a water Demon. He had never met either before. Sesshomaru made odd friends in the fifty-three years he had not seen him.

"I have brought you... a human delicacy named...Pop-Tarts. They're highly esteemed for their...sugar." Sesshomaru held the box up to his face, twisting trying to read the unfamiliar language. Loki knew that his youki, while translating and articulating foreign languages well verbally, did not work well in reading nor writing. Sesshomaru tossed the box to Loki and a bottle of water. Loki caught both, sitting up from the concrete floor, leaning back against a crate. He felt his joints pop and crack as the small girl approached him.

"Hello Uncle Loki! I'm Rin pleased to meet you! Lord Sesshomaru told me you are his friend and he is helping your irksome presence out of trouble!" Loki managed a faint, but real smile. When was the last time someone called him a friend?

"Gods! Nothing but trouble! He will be the death of us all!" Jaken grumbled, and was silenced when Sesshomaru smacked him down, knocking him out.

"Pleased to meet you Lady Rin, I take it you have been keeping Lord Sesshomaru out of trouble as well?" Loki opened the box and picked out a foil packet. Rin giggled and nodded. Sesshomaru clenched a fist in response, glaring down at Loki who only shrugged and smiled in response.

Loki brightened when Rin sat down beside him. He magicked her some runes on the floor, she gasped and clapped when they swirled and melded on the floor like a kaleidoscope.

"A Director Fury arrives today. Only Stark and Romanoff of the Avengers know of your presence." Sesshomaru leapt onto a crate and squatted down, peering down at Loki with unreadable eyes.

'I loathe when he just stares like that. And great, Fury, of all the days.' Loki grumbled and opened the packet. It smelled almost entirely too sweet.

"You won't tolerate Fury. I know him, he will provoke you, it may be...unsavory. You best tell
Thor you refuse to meet him." Loki leveled an emerald eyes gaze at him. And to Loki's mild surprise Sesshomaru nodded gently.

"Romanoff and Stark advised me similarly, but this Fury's objective is me. I won't be conversing with him. I have had my fill of insufferable humans." Sesshomaru's tone flickered with a small amount scorn, while clawing the crate below him as a cat would.

"How in the nines are you going to get away without speaking to..." Loki trailed off. "You want me to be you." Loki laughed darkly as Sesshomaru's gaze brightened in acknowledgement.

This could be fun.

"A wise tactic. You are familiar with him. I will lend you Tenseiga and Bakusaiga." Sesshomaru said causally, gesturing to his swords, one with which he was quite familiar, the other he had no inkling of its origin. It was not a sword Inu no Taisho carried on his person. He would have recognized Tessaiga or that horrid Sounga.

"You'd entrust me your swords? I didn't know our friendship ran that deep." Loki questioned, in genuine disbelief and Sesshomaru melted part of the crate to reveal parts of its contents. That question obviously irked the dog Demon. Loki tilted his head to the side in confusion, he hadn't meant any offense by the comment.

Ah, Sesshomaru is taking this seriously. I took his assessment of the situation too lightly.

"Tenseiga, he is curious of you. Bakusaiga's hilt is not to be touched in any capacity. You cannot wield her; She is not to be toyed with." Sesshomaru warned stonily and Loki took it to heart. He did not know Sesshomaru when this new sword came into being. He has not seen him since his half-blooded brother got pinned to a tree by a priestess of some skill. Since they had that stupid argument, Loki inwardly winced at the words he last said to him.

'Sesshomaru was disappointed when I informed him my magic had no effect on the arrow. And then I had to go and project my troubles onto him. I do not blame him for his reaction.' Loki recalled.

"Understood my friend, I truly meant no offense. Where will you be located when Fury arrives?" Loki asked back, not meaning to sound nervous, but his pulse picked up in tempo regardless. Sesshomaru picked up on it instantly, as Loki knew he would.

"Rin wishes to go to the woods in the middle of the metropolis and try this new creation called ice cream. Jaken and I will escort her there. Stark and Romanoff think it good for her to face her fears. My proximity barrier will alert us of extreme discord." Sesshomaru looked to Jaken, as if willing him to challenge his decision, who just came to from being knocked out.

"It is a fascinating change to see such selflessness in you Sesshomaru, but surely you will not be going in public wearing those gaudy garments." Sesshomaru tilted his chin upwards, a slight lilt of humor.

"Such brazen words spoken from one who dons a bronze helm with horns. A human might question which of us is the Demon Lord." Sesshomaru tilted his chin upwards, a slight lilt of humor.

"I looked quite dashing in those horns. Who told you about those?" Loki jested and then his head cleared. He hadn't thought that the Avengers would speak so freely of him. Sesshomaru's ears wiggled.
"Pepper Potts. She is aware of your presence here in the fortress. She is...a fiery human. I overheard Thor tell her that I went ten to his eleven wins in our old tournaments. She seemed impressed." Sesshomaru scratched his claws into the crate again and Loki rolled his eyes. He never watched their unruly tournaments.

"Fishing for compliments I see." Loki drawled. Sesshomaru melted the crate more.

"She has provided me suitable garments. She adores Rin muchly; she is ambivalent about Jaken; she reviles you." Sesshomaru supplied thoughtfully, revealing a fang.

"I would think so. I am shocked she has not stormed down here to lecture, shoot me, or worse." Loki’s emerald gaze darkened, but held some light. Maybe there was some hope that she didn't. Or maybe she was setting far worse a trap. Maybe something involving the Iron Man suit or the Hulk.

Loki took a large bite of his pop-tart. A bit sweet but good regardless. Really good. He couldn't remember the last time he ate, much less anything sweet

"...She reported you tossed Stark from his own window." Sesshomaru's eyes brightened and his ears lifted up.

"Ah yes, that was a delightful exchange. He had a suit which has flight capabilities. He survived." Loki defended unnecessarily. He knew Sesshomaru thought the same. Loki took another bite of his pop-tart as he noticed Sesshomaru shift awkwardly to the side, face revealing nothing. He continued to scratch the crate.

"Loki…I am unaccustomed to such attention from humans. What do these ten numbers mean? Stark sputtered in revulsion when Lady Potts smiled and gave them to me." Sesshomaru tossed the paper down, feeling particularly conversational. Loki, surprised at the amount of words coming from Sesshomaru, picked up the note from the floor.

'Sesshomaru, did you perhaps miss our friendship?' Loki's eyes widened at the note, and the red ink in which it was written.

"You mongrel." Loki shook his head and Sesshomaru cocked his head slightly like a dog would. "These numbers are a code you enter to a communication device. You input those numbers and you can speak to her if she so desires wherever she is in this realm." Loki, with a bit of magic tossed the paper back and Sesshomaru caught it carefully and put it in his yukata. Sesshomaru managed an upward twitch of his lips.

"I accept her code. It makes Stark irate." Sesshomaru waited for the information to sink into his friend.

Pause.

"Wait. This implies that the Spider and Stark and Potts...they are..." For a few times in his life words failed Loki. Elation filled his chest for the first time in ages. He nearly stood and danced in happiness but that would surely cause Sesshomaru to scoff. Instead, he took another bite of the pop tart.

"They are under the impression that we understated our fighting capabilities which renders them intrigued to entertain your claim." Sesshomaru explained, leaping off the crate in an inhuman grace as Loki inhaled the pastry.

"Ah. So it was the spar that sparked their interest. My ruse to get our fight recorded went well despite your sour attitude towards it." Loki began to eat the second pop tart with fervor.
Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes downwards towards the seated god.

"My own ruse has been a success as well." Sesshomaru ghosted a smile. "I shall notify you when Fury is incoming and give you Tenseiga and Bakusaiga then." Sesshomaru turned to leave.

"Wait. What ruse?" Loki inquired with skepticism.

"Lord Sesshomaru gave you your brother's Pop Tarts! It seems you and Storm God have similar tastes Uncle Loki." Rin hopped up and down following Sesshomaru out the door.

"This means war, dog!" Loki shook his fist in mock anger at the long swishing silver hair that left, never pausing. He inhaled three more packets of pop-tarts.

About three hours passed from what Loki could tell, he had been dozing in and out before he sensed Sesshomaru's youki again and he appeared, looking non-plussed.

Sesshomaru stood in a scarlet t-shirt which may have been a hair tight, hinting at his toned chest. Over the t-shirt was a lightweight black leather bomber jacket and dark wash jeans, again perhaps a shade too tight around his derriere and slim hips. On his feet were alligator skin boots. His long silver hair remained down but perched on his bangs were a pair of aviator sunglasses.

Gone was the intimidating and imposing Demon Lord, standing before him was an attractive Midgardian, it made Loki chuckle darkly.

'In no way is Sesshomaru used to appearing this way, his quest into New York should prove of great amusement to me.' Loki felt his mouth stretch into a catlike smile. Loki never thought of his relationship with Sesshomaru as anything other than platonic. But he understood, where Sesshomaru did not, about his striking beauty.

'Sesshomaru has never come to terms with being described with compliments slanting towards the feminine aesthetic. His father was indeed handsome and rugged, and even his younger half-brother looked more masculine. However, he is no delicate flower, and the tight clothes revealed this. He is ever slender, ever more so than I, yet toned in his own right.' Loki enjoyed taking in the contrast between his normal look and this.

"Gawking is impolite Mischief God." And Loki swore he saw Sesshomaru's cheeks darken, but it was probably the lighting. He held the two swords outstretched in his clawed hand. A paper shopping bag in the other.

"You look ravishing my dear." Loki mocked and took the opportunity to shapeshift into Sesshomaru in his familiar garb before Sesshomaru could strike him with his whip. He took Tenseiga first and he felt the oddest sensation, like it said something to him. He quickly tied the sword to his Chinese inspired sash and then with great care took Bakusaiga by its sheath, not hilt, and tied it as well.

Tenseiga felt content. Bakusaiga felt absolutely disagreeable.

"Hmph. Bakusaiga has my youki within her. She will also trick Fury's scans and the Storm God if you keep your magic low. Do not do anything unwise." Sesshomaru answered pointed and he saw Jaken garbed a large AC/DC hooded sweatshirt, clearly Stark's, covering his head, and child sized sandals with socks. Rin looked adorable in an orange sundress and white sweater with her hair brushed and in her normal pony tail.

"I am aware of what is at stake, Lord of Demons." Loki responded in his best Sesshomaru impression, stoic face and all.
Sesshomaru blinked, eyes wide.

"Lord Sesshomaru, he looks and sounds just like you! You are very good Uncle Loki! Now I have two Lord Sesshomarus!" Rin held her hand out. "High five!" Loki hit her hand with his now clawed one and Rin giggled.

Sesshomaru's knuckles snapped and his shoulders tensed.

"Foolish girl! This God can never be on the same caliber as Lord Sesshomaru! Come so we can get you your terrible human food!" Jaken ordered, trying to walk with the staff of two heads, excess sweatshirt fabric hampering his movements.

"Your brother taught Rin the high five. Don't worry you'll do great Uncle Loki!" Rin beamed Loki tried his hardest not to smile, because Sesshomaru didn't smile, as Rin waved.

Sesshomaru spared one last appraising glance his way before flicking down his aviators and sauntering out the door with Jaken and Rin.

'Damn vain Demon Lord and his meddling, though I suppose turnabout is fair play.' Loki soured, looking down at his striped hands, trying hard not to toy with his now outrageously long, silken silver hair. He had never, in the history of their friendship, ever attempted to shapeshift into Sesshomaru before, it felt entirely too surreal.

He paced about for about a half hour, trying to get used to his new form, and then strolled up all the way up to the main penthouse floor and felt his heart race and his throat swell. He had shape shifted for centuries, but never before has he felt such anxiety. How did he think this would be fun?! This was madness! What was he supposed to do with this fur pelt?!

He felt like a sheep in wolves clothing. Dog's clothing? He cracked his knuckles knowing Sesshomaru would do the same. He entered the room, completely on edge, so much so that he didn't see the man laying down on the sofa.

Tenseiga hummed.

"Oh, of course, the guy who drives the party bus wakes up fresh as a daisy, while his victims feel like roadkill underneath it." Loki almost stiffened, he knew that scintillating voice. He knew that clean smell.

Clint. Barton. That's what Sesshomaru meant by unwise. His heart skipped a beat. Probably three beats. He looked exactly how he remembered him, all chiseled lines, strong muscles, soft hair and roving eyes.

"Indeed. I expect the others have a similar opinion." Loki surprised himself. That sounded somewhat like his best friend. He relaxed his jaw.

'Keep it together Loki' Loki cheered himself on.

"Well, Nat and Steve are fine, Steve can't reeeaaaally get drunk, and Nat's Russian, so well they are inhuman. Tony and Bruce look like they got hit with bricks. Thor is Thor. He's pissed someone ate his pop-tarts." Clint implied the theft at his direction and Loki fought the urge to roll his eyes.

"This Sesshomaru does not consume human food. Rin is acquainted with them." Loki managed to not sweat. So far so good. 'Breathe, you are the God of Lies, Breathe.' Loki exhaled deeply through his nose.
"I told Tho-"

"Son if Taisho! Did you consume my pastry of toasters?! I had Lady Pepper procure a box of them and they have vanished!" Thor lumbered into the room and Loki felt himself blanche.

'Why did I agree to this again? This must be payback for the Bifrost. Or maybe mentioning that dark elf throwing him in the lake on video.' Loki almost shook his head, here he was, face to face with his brother after all this time, and he talks of sweets. Loki fought the urge to flee, to teleport away and be done with the whole charade.

But Seshsomaru would claim that quite unwise.

"Storm god-' Loki, luckily, recalled Sesshomaru never called Thor by his name, cut off by Stark flouncing into the room, he noticed Stark gave him a quick, cold wink.

Yes. Definitely punishment.

"Toady and Little Miss Sunshine probably housed them Point Break. We will buy you some more. Let's all get ready to meet our friendly neighborhood pirate shall we?" Tony took a seat next to Pepper who looked all business.

"Hey, you're lookin' a little pale Sesshoumaru. Don't worry Fury won't do anything except sound off. Just don't...try to strangle him like you did Tony on the Quinjet." Steve appeared at his side. Loki let loose a thin smirk, not breaking character.

"I shall do my due diligence to leave him unharmed." Loki's practiced quicksilver tongue responded and Stark gave him a hidden thumbs up.

'By the nines this is the most backwards day.' Loki almost swallowed.

"That's all we can ask you for Pretty Boy." He heard the spider speak coyly behind him.

'For an ice cold Demon Lord they are oddly fond of him after only a day. Mayhap this will work.' Loki exhaled through his nose.

"Captain! Romanoff! Barton! Thor! Someone better explain to me why you found a magical signature belonging to Loki. On. Earth. And didn't bring him to SHIELD. Where is that damned God?! I'll drag him back to his cage myself." Fury's voice, incandescent with anger, hammered into from the hall. He stormed into the room, bringing a wave of rage with him.

He understood exactly why Sesshomaru wouldn't have lasted with Fury. He'd be a smear on a wall.

"Man of Fury! It was a misunderstanding! My brother is still imprisoned on Asgard! This is my friend and guest Sesshomaru, Son of Taisho, Lord of Demons and the Western Lands! He has travelled through time on the Bifrost!" Thor puffed his muscular chest out wide and smiled, Loki could tell he was fighting the urge to pat 'Sesshomaru.' on the back.

"Are you certain? When was the last time you took attendance?" Fury asked Thor and he looked caught off guard.

"I could not consult Heimdall last night, the Bifrost may be damaged due to Son of Taisho's arrival. However, I can assure you my brother cannot escape Asgard's defenses." Thor sounded more confident than he looked.
"How convenient that your front door is broken. And a Demon Lord? Travelling through time? What is this Doctor Who?! How do we know he isn't Loki who shape shifted into this son of a bitch?!” Fury's eye rolled almost out of its socket.

'Oh Fury has no idea how accurate his curse is.' Loki fought the urge to grin.

"Man of Fury, please respect my guest! I will ask him a question only the Son of Taisho would know!" Thor responded gleefully crossing his arms.

Stark, Spider, and Potts stiffened. Loki nearly scoffed in indignation on cue, there was nothing Thor knew about Sesshomaru that he didn't.

"Well, we can play twenty questions, never ever have I ever, ride the bus, or we can just scan him for Loki's magic energy." Stark suggested instead and Fury raised a hand in protest.

"No. If Loki did indeed escape he may have found a way to compromise the tech. And what better way to infiltrate the Avengers than to pose as Thor's long lost girlfriend!? Are all you this blind?!" Fury banged his fist on the counter and his other hand itched for his gun. Agent Hill beside him stood like a statue, her hand never straying far from her holster.

"Sir, he is not a woman. It's insens-" Steve began to defend and was cut off.

"Insensitive Captain? We are not in some feelings seminar! This is a threat to global security!" Fury fired back, pointing to Sesshomaru. Loki noticed Banner started to pace.

Then Loki saw Agent Coulson eyeing him lethally. 'So he did survive. That's one soul not lost to the underworld.'

"What methods you seek to prove that I am not this... Trickster God...make haste. I grow tired of you insufferable humans." Loki tried his best 'disdainful Sesshomaru.' and determined he should try shape shifting into Thor if he pulled off this elaborate ruse.

"Agreed! Son of Taisho! As you know Loki never watched our melee tournaments, and cared not for them. Your question, what was our record for our tournaments?!” Thor pointed to Sesshomaru, nodding, proud of himself.

Pause.

The air in the room almost became unbearable with tension, like a poisonous miasma.

Loki's heart fisted into his throat. Probably the one question he didn't know. He hated those damn things. It was more of a way to have everyone's father's jeer and brag about their sons' talents. A pissing contest if anything, and a father could only enter one offspring.

Odin never chose him.

He scanned the room, buying time, and caught everyone's eyes, even Potts.

'Potts. The phone number. Sesshomaru told me! That either cunning or lucky dog, Luck never favors me, so this must be his karma.' Loki felt relief sweep over him, he tried hard to not let it show.

"Our record, as you recall Storm God, was my ten wins to your eleven." Loki managed to calm his heart enough to speak, and managed a slight look of annoyance at revealing a weakness.

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"That is indeed correct Son of Taisho! See? He is who claims to be!" Thor approached Loki, perhaps vying for a hug. Just how well did Thor remember Sesshomaru?

Pepper Potts and Tony looked like they were going to faint. Romanoff inclined her head slightly.

"You should give Fancy Pants here a chance to tie it up, or you know give yourself a two-win lead." Barton cut the tension and Fury went from angry to confused and angry.

"Son of Taisho would never tell my brother such a fact, because doing so would be a weakness! We clashed closely and strenuously!" Loki widened his eyes, but no one thankfully noticed.

'Did Sesshomaru really believe that to be true? That I would care over such a trifle?' Loki fought the urge to puff hair up and into his itching bangs.

"Have we quite completed this useless endeavor?" Loki frowned a bit.

"Yes! Can you all go, I don't know, cite a girl scout troop for parading without a permit or something?" Tony scratched the back of his neck.

"We, too, were led to believe he was indeed Loki, Fury. However, we cannot bring every person we come across with a magic signature similar to Loki's that comes through the Bifrost to SHIELD. What if it was Frigga or Odin? We could start a war." Natasha attempted to reason.

Then Fury stomped up to him, getting right in Loki's face as if seeing through his magic.

"I don't like you. I don't trust you. I'm just glad Thor here can keep you in check. I'll be watching you...Demon Lord. Don't you dare try to cross me; you'll be sorry you did." Fury pointed his finger in Loki's face and he knew if Sesshomaru was in here he'd have shattered his arm by now.

Loki decided to go for it and iced his gaze over, making sure to keep his magic low and clenched his jaw. He closed the gap and looked down on Fury just barely and slowly lifted his left hand and slapped the finger away with a flick of a striped wrist.

"This Sesshomaru does as he pleases, human." Loki's mind almost blanked and said mortal instead of human.

Fury flung his arm down, knocking Loki's and strode away with Hill and Coulson following. Loki's left hand knocked back into an unfamiliar object.

Bakusaiga's hilt.

He felt a biting stab of incredible youki through his thin magic shell and knew exactly what had happened.

'Thank the nine for Sesshomaru's dramatic fashion sense, because the long sleeve just covers my non-clawed, non-striped wrist.' Loki attempted to hide the now human-like hand.

Sesshomaru was even paler than Loki and now even his skin tone was off. Loki couldn't fix it with magic or he'd tip off Thor. Then, he then felt something dreadful. At the place where his skin actually touched the hilt, he felt cold.

'No. Not here. Not my Jotun skin.' Loki's mouth thinned. The circle of skin, no larger than a plum, on the back of his hand had to be blue with a raised line of skin by now.

'At least it is not growing. A small relief.' Loki began to sweat.
"Thor, even the bifrost works again, you are to remain Planet-side with your girlfriend, girlfriends. Barton, Romanoff, I want you to report back to SHIELD at oh eight hundred tomorrow." Fury ordered, not bothering to look back.

"Yes sir." Romanoff and Barton chorused.

When Fury left, the tension in the room immediately lifted.

"I have to commend you Sesshomaru, you held it together really well. Fury had me rankled and I wasn't even the one he was talking to." Banner was the first to say anything defending him.

"Thor gets two girlfriends, and what do I get? A hangover and cold coffee. Good thing Dr. Foster is in Finland." Barton ribbed Thor and Thor darkened red.

"I have never courted Son of Taisho! I have not craved him as a potential bedmate. Not that, ahem, you are not lovely, nor…worthy." Thor, stammered and coughed.

Stark clapped his hands once bit his lips in the universal symbol of 'this is awkward'. Romanoff looked Loki in his eyes with a 'you so deserve this' gaze. Rogers in the back shuffled and Barton barked in laughter.

'If you have any mercy, nines, please strike me dead now.' Loki sliced his eyes to Thor and managed a small growl.

"…Point Break it's ok to leave the house hungry as long as you go home to eat." Stark finally composed himself. Rogers gave a chastising gaze to Stark and he just shrugged back.

"Aye! And I am famished! Let's forage for some sustenance!" Stark shook his head, clearly the innuendo flew over Thor's head. Thor, this time, swung his hand back and smacked Loki on his back in an attempt to smooth things over.

Loki's hands shot instinctually out to balance and his hands shot out of the sleeves for a moment.

But a moment is all Clint Barton, Hawkeye, needed.

Because then all hell broke loose.
Sesshomaru and the Astral Plane

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I do not have any affiliations or attachments to Q model management nor Soul Cycle. Any resemblance to any actual person is coincidental.

Sesshomaru and the Astral Plane

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"You don't look like you're from around here." Sesshomaru's ears pricked up, a human woman had just sat down on the bench next to him in front of the ice cream shop. She was attractive, even by Demon standards, had long blonde hair, large green eyes and subtle facial paint. She like Romanoff, was fit, and athletic with curved features. Was she attempting to engage in conversation with him?

"You are correct." He wished not to engage in conversation, yet he knew he had to discover more about this realm, and she seemed particularly harmless.

"Lord Sesshomaru, I can't understand anyone here except Polly!" Rin exclaimed from beside him and the blonde woman's finger pointed up in recognition.

"Ah, you're from Japan, I recognize the language, the 'sama' part. My son loves their cartoons." She turned to him, looking at his left hand. Sesshomaru looked down at it, then back at her.

"Are you maybe some sort of artist? I know a lot of artists do the whole facial tattoo thing. Yours suit you though. I know how tough it can be to be a single parent, if you have any questions like where to find things in the city or maybe things to do with your daughter you can text me." The woman added, looking to Sesshomaru. He merely blinked. Single father? She handed him a card. Yet another card!

"I'll accept this." Sesshomaru nodded, he may indeed need help procuring Rin vital items.

"I'm Cadence, I'm a Soul Cycle instructor. Stop by for a spin! Usually I don't give freebies but for you I'll make an exception." She flashed a smile at him and winked Sesshomaru's ears went up. He had no idea what this cyclic soul spinning was, but it appeared she attempted to show a physical interest in him. How bizarre.

"Well, I got to run, have to pick up Tyler. Enjoy the city!" She stood and waved, and walked off with her ice cream. Sesshomaru looked back down to Rin.

"Lord Sesshomaru, did another human give you a communication code?" Rin stared at the card he held in his hands and pocketed it.

"Yes, Rin." Sesshomaru nodded as Jaken emerged from the shop as well, holding his staff of two heads.

"Lord Sesshomaru, I must say that the human men and women of this realm act most untoward to you!" Jaken shook his staff grouchily and Rin nodded in agreement.

The whole day had really perplexed the Demon Lord, especially one particular encounter.
"Jaken, go investigate and find this Ice Cream." Sesshomaru ordered and Jaken nodded and hastily set out to ask a human where this Ice Cream could be located. The Demon Lord monitored as he found a lone human male standing the corner of the street. Sesshomaru flipped his sunglasses up, finding himself in shade.

"I am on a quest to find Ice Cream! Where can I locate some?" Jaken asked the man and he looked down at him, eyes wide.

"Little boy, are you alone?! Where is your mother? Does she know you are dressed in costume?" He asked, sounding concerned. This caused Sesshomaru to tilt his head in confusion. Did they think Jaken was a boy?

"I am most certainly not alone! I am with my Lord Sesshomaru! Do you know where we can locate some ice cream?!" Jaken cried and pointed as the young man, again quite attractive for a human, looked up, eyes lighting in recognition.

"Oh, I see! You're playing some sort of game…Oh wow, this is your father?!" He approached Sesshomaru and he simply nodded. He stood in front of him, blue eyes darting over his body, he had his blond short hair pushed back, and dressed similarly to himself. He also looked down to Rin who stood beside Sesshomaru looking up at him.

"Hello there, I'm Jason Sisson, Q Model Management...You definitely have that 'IT' factor. Have you ever thought of modelling? I mean, you are the perfect height and build. not to mention your androgyny and bone structure are perfect for editorial. Your hair! I can spot extensions from a mile away, that's all natural. We have signed tattooed models before so we can make that work. And your eye color! Never seen anything like it, again, can't be contacts. I bet I can even get some commercials for your little girl." The tall man, Jason, leaned back, putting his hand under his chin in appraisal. Sesshomaru just stared at him and narrowed his eyes.

"Modelling…explain." Sesshomaru demanded, what was he going on about?

"Oh, just take my card call my assistant and make an appointment." Jason scribbled down a number on the back of the card "I'm sure you're a busy man, but we could all use the extra dollars, your kids gotta eat. I see no ring on that finger, alimony and child support in this city sure aren't cheap either!" Jason winked and Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side slightly.

"I see you're a man of few words. Love it. Talk is cheap, and time is money. I saw a family owned ice cream shop down that way too authentic. I'd totally join you but I gotta fly. I put my personal number on the back in case you're interested. Ciao!" He flashed a bright smile pointed in the direction they were currently heading and handed Sesshomaru the card. He flipped it over, two communication codes. He watched as the man held out his hand and a yellow vehicle stopped for him and he got inside. How odd. Jaken approached.

"Let us go find this ice cream." Sesshomaru pocketed the card, he would have to investigate these 'dollars'. He had no idea what this modelling entailed however, he was a Demon Lord and capable of anything these humans could do.

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'Well, at least Polly, the ice cream vendor proved herself useful. She qualified as even more tolerable than most of Thor's friends. Her approval of his barter for the ice cream was most advantageous since apparently humans in this realm use a mystifying means of trade. These
"dollars", I must understand them.' Sesshomaru ensured the paper she gave him was in the back pocket of his tight jean hakamas, with the others he collected.

Ping!

'Of course that Mischief God would compromise the plan even before I could take Rin to the woods. Ever fickle his magic.' Sesshomaru fisted his clawed hand.

"Lord Sesshomaru did you feel that?! Bakusaiga and Tenseiga are in peril!" Jaken felt the ping as well and Sesshomaru bent down to pick up Rin with one hand, Jaken with the other. He took to the air, shielding Rin and Jaken from unnecessary wind with his youki and bounded back towards the tower. He landed softly on the balcony, assessing the situation inside.

"Lord Sesshomaru, Uncle Loki and Storm God's ice creams are melting! Can we get more ice cream tomorrow?" Rin bit her lip, holding a cone in each hand, one of cookie dough, the other mint chocolate chip. Sesshomaru had no taste for the sweet foods of this realm, but he made a note of their labels to be sure Rin obtained the one she desired. He nodded as they entered.

Sesshomaru winced upon hearing the shouting, yelling and crashing. His ears still rang from being outside.

He observed Loki was no longer shapeshifted, but still wore Tenseiga and Bakusaiga. Stark and Romanoff stood in front of Rogers, who was thankfully not in bedclothes, Barton, who was now livid with bow drawn arrow knocked, and Thor who was swinging Mjolnir. The Berserker and Lady Potts were nowhere in sight.

'Perfect. Loki has riled them all up. I am in no mood to deescalate emotional humans.' Sesshomaru marched towards the room.

"I swear Nat I'll shoot right through you. I won't give a damn. How dare you defend him!" Clint's face had flushed purple in anger.

"Heed my last request! What have you done with Son of Taisho, Lady Rin and little Jaken?! Have you slain them?! If you have..." Thor threatened lowly, a rogue thunderclap cracked outside.

"Clint. I'm not defending him; we have new intel that we need to go over. There is a lot at stake. I would never defend what he did to you." Romanoff had her hands out in a clear 'no harm meant' pose.

"This is low even for you Tony. Is there even a Sesshomaru? This is practically treason!" Rogers stood directly in front of Stark, looking betrayed.

"Yes, there is a Sailor Moon, and treason? You know the track record I've had with the government; they did put Hammertech all over one of my suits. This is just a bit of payback." Stark grinned but Steve's frown deepened. "But seriously, need you to hear us out." Stark back peddled, stammering for the right words.

'Irksome gods, troublesome humans.' Sesshomaru sighed through his nose

Sesshomaru didn't need his sense of smell to know that matters were about to become out of hand. He sauntered into the room, behind Barton, Thor and Rogers.

He noticed Loki's emerald eyes flicker to him and reflexively relaxed. Stark's dark, intelligent eyes widened and looked him up and down. Romanoff looked annoyed and pleased at the same time. His ears flickered down.
"I instructed you not to do anything unwise Loki." Sesshomaru's stoic tone cut through the tension. Three more pairs of eyes were on him in a second.

Barton's bow remained on Loki but his brown eyes burned with malice and shock at Sesshomaru. Sesshomaru flipped up his aviators in response.

"Fashionably late I see." Romanoff responded.

"Son of Taisho and company! You are safe!" Thor decreed and Rin scampered up, between a now confused Thor and Loki with melting ice cream cones.

"Uncle Loki! I got you ice cream! Yours is green because Lord Sesshomaru says that's your favorite color. Here eat it before it all melts!" Rin handed a very surprised Loki an ice cream cone then scampered off to Thor.

Romanoff, impressed, lifted her shoulders and nodded to Stark in a 'good job'.

"Rin got you an ice cream too Storm God! The vendor Polly said it was the sweetest one! Rin is also sorry she gave Uncle Loki all of your pastry of toasters!" Rin confessed and Thor also took his ice cream cone in befuddlement.

"Good job Rin. Now go play with Jaken." Sesshomaru's said neutrally and Rin saluted and skipped off with Jaken who was still wearing the AC/DC sweatshirt.

Pause.

"Brother you ate my pastries?" Thor accused and Loki put his palm to his forehead slowly.

"What fresh hell is this?" Barton gritted his teeth.

"So it worked. You broke Loki out of Asgardian prison and brought him here. Super." Rogers was at a complete loss.

"This Sesshomaru is no thief. As I have stated earlier, if Loki coveted liberty he would have it." Sesshomaru looked bored. Barton looked ready to murder. Rogers and Romanoff regarded the archer carefully.

"Why did you deceive us so Son of Taisho? Why the mind games with shape shifting?" Thor licked his ice cream cone. Steve glared at him and Thor shrugged and ate more of it.

Sesshomaru knew he had to practice extreme discretion with his movements and emotions. Tensions were still spider silk tight in the room. He was thankful his current attire made him appear less of a threat and that Loki still had Tenseiga and Bakusaiga.

Tenseiga was pulsing deeply and Bakusaiga bristled in agitation.

"This Sesshomaru has deceived no one." Sesshomaru replied mildly, looked to Loki who was hiding his left hand.

"Deceived no one?! You had Loki pretend to be you to meet Fury, maybe the one guy who dislikes the guy more than me!" Barton boomed and Sesshomaru's ears twitched in protest.

"I never vowed to meet this commander of yours." Sesshomaru tilted his chin up in defense.

"Under advisement from Romanoff, Stark, and Lady Potts, they compelled me to employ a gambit for Sesshomaru. This tactic would ensure the life of your commander and prevent undue
complications for you." Loki spoke for the first time, his voice rough. Rogers looked like he was starting to come around.

Sesshomaru fought the urge to crack his knuckles. He did not fully understand the ire behind the archer.

Then Lady Potts and the Berserker entered the room, the latter looking worse for the wear.

"Good. You're here. I'm glad the clothes fit. Can you do your thing where you make Bruce calm down?" Lady Potts greeted. All poise and authority with a hint of nervousness.

Sesshomaru examined the Berserker and indeed his heart rate was elevated, breathing labored, and skin a sickened green, he was clawing at his own skin. Sesshomaru scented a pang of fear from Romanoff.

Sesshomaru closed his eyes, held out his left arm, and concentrated his youki into a perfect sphere. He flicked his fingers and shot the bubble of youki at the writhing Berserker.

"Stand down Berserker." Sesshomaru commanded.

And the Berserker gradually did.

"And just when were you going to let us know Loki was here?!" Barton still shook with rage.

"The plan was that Loki remain as our lovely Sailor Moon here until the real deal showed up and we explain everything, you know, big reveal. Abracadabra." Stark responded and the tension, except Barton, began to fade and turn to confusion.

"Plausible deniability. The more of you who thought he was the real one, the less Fury could use against you in the future. It would also make any adverse reactions more believable." Romanoff explained. Rogers shook his head, still looking betrayed.

"I do not like these schemes." Thor frowned, still eating his ice cream to the disbelief of Rogers, Loki was letting his melt, daring not to move.

"We can't operate this way Tony, Natasha. We all need to be on the same page. Now Fury thinks we are hiding something, and we are!" Steve, stressed, flung out his arms in frustration. "Why deceive Fury in the first place, why aren't we turning Loki over to him?" Steve finally asked the question that he wanted to ask.

"We have reason to believe that Loki wasn't the true leader of the first invasion of Earth three years ago. Last night he also revealed to Pretty Boy that there may be a second invasion to occur in less than three months by the real perpetrators. We needed to run it by you before Fury found out about Glow Stick over there, or before he antagonized Pretty Boy." Natasha explained and Thor finally stopped swinging Mjolnir and Steve looked to Loki who merely waved his fingers meekly.

"I don't care if Loki is the second coming of Jesus. He brainwashed me, made me his puppet and Fury still doesn't fully trust me. Can I please put some arrows in him already?!" Barton shouted to no one in particular and everyone looked around.

Sesshomaru straightened and his eyes went wide. 'Puppet. Kagura.'

He turned to Loki whose eyes completely dimmed and his face crumpled. Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and his ears raised, Bakusaiga gnashed her blade within her sheath.
I am disappointed, perhaps Storm God was correct in that Loki has changed. Could he have turned into a Naraku? No. Too soon to make that judgment. Circumstances have not been fully brought to light. I understand the pain of Barton now. Only a good soldier, like Barton, would keep seeking for affirmation from his comrades after such a deed. They are foolish to not understand his frustrations, to not see his struggle. This archer and Kagura, what each befell them is not dissimilar.' Sesshomaru assessed, chest clenching when thinking of Kagura, shrouded in purple black smoke, fading in the field of flowers Rin loved so much.

Pause.

"Can you Barton?" Sesshomaru replied evenly. All the Avengers whipped towards them, Berserker, now clear-headed, the only one catching on to his meaning.

"Is that a challenge Fancy Pants?" Barton's voice was almost shrill and Sesshomaru fought the urge to massage his temples. Sesshomaru tossed his hair.

"It is an earnest request. He impugned your honor. You deserve to amend it." Sesshomaru's gold eyes almost glowed and he looked around for protest. The Berserker's jaw dropped, floored and the pallor fully returned to his face.

Sesshomaru turned and caught Loki's green gaze and found a strength there.

"You don't need to ask twice Fancy Pants." Barton's fiery gaze smoked out to embers and the room's energy turned to one of uncertainty.

"I am not sure I can condone this..." Rogers looked around to assess the opinions of his comrades and Sesshomaru decided to remove himself from the situation.

He put his leather jacket down on the back of a chair and extended his right hand out facing Loki with a flourish. For the briefest of seconds, a look of betrayal entered Loki's eyes identifiable to Sesshomaru only. His hand glowed blue.

"Tenseiga, Bakusaiga to me." Sesshomaru's order reverberated deep and the swords rattled and shot by Stark, sheath first, and adhered to his left side on the leather belt. Sesshomaru caught Loki's gaze one last time, noting the hint of betrayal was gone.

'He thought I aimed to strike him. Foolish God. If I had wanted to harm him, I would have done so by now.' Putting on his sunglasses once more and with a swish of hair, he strode out of the room for the rooftop access.

Tenseiga was silent. Bakusaiga murmured.

"Ok, that was cool. You gonna eat that Bambi?" He heard Stark ask as he disappeared from the room.

He arrived on the roof, and closed his eyes, turning over the new information in his mind. He didn't know what to make of it. He was so deep in thought he was almost surprised by the Berserker standing beside him.

"You're pretty terrifying you know." The berserker sighed. Sesshomaru didn't open his eyes.

Sesshomaru flicked his sunglasses back up, gazed at him, quirked an eyebrow and flashed a fang at him. The Berserker chuckled in agreement.

"Yeah, trust me, I know the other guy is terrifying. Thanks again for the...you know." Sesshomaru
exhaled through his nose.

"Do not act on pretense it will be a regular occurrence." Sesshomaru quipped, claws flexing.

"Of course, wouldn't want you too." The Berserker's usually passive gaze held something hard within and Sesshomaru just felt tired.

He heard clacking, and wiggled an ear, seeing Lady Potts, with the mint chocolate chip ice cream cone, and Romanoff approach, both looking agitated. Sesshomaru inhaled deeply, closing his eyes, dreaming of sloping grassy hills, a breeze that would call his name, glistening creeks and verdant forests.

"You've just started a real argument down there. Steve is aghast about starting an Avengers firing squad, Thor is waffling between understanding your point of view, returning Loki to Asgard or breaking Clint's arm, and Tony is trying to convince Clint not to immediately contact SHIELD." Romanoff, stern as concrete, bit out and Sesshomaru had had enough.

"In my opinion this is all Loki's fault. He brought Sesshomaru here, right? Besides, Sesshomaru was right about Clint and Loki." Lady Potts defended and Sesshomaru felt the bottom fall out of something. What was he doing this for? Loki? Their friendship? It had been five hundred and fifty years for the God. He must have found other sources of amusement and kinship. Could he be using him like Barton? If there were truly no Demons left in this region, he wouldn't be saving his own realm, he would be saving this dying realm of stinking humans.

Sesshomaru heard the huntress reply and he heard another voice, probably the Berserker's. He didn't care. Let these humans champion themselves. Let Loki explain himself. He was done being talked about as if he wasn't in the room. He was done being regarded as an oddity when they themselves made little sense.

Bakusaiga chirped.

'This endeavor is truly a waste of time. Loki, the Mad Titan, invasions, honor, communication codes, the ice cream vendor Polly and her music suggestions, Stark and his armor, Romanoff and her bullets. I should not have been transfixed by such delusions that these humans and the Gods were capable of cooperation and clarity, despite how strong and capable they seem. It is truly a delusion that what happens here is somehow any responsibility of mine.' Sesshomaru's eyes remained closed.

He felt his senses drift. He heard Bakusaiga warble.

What exactly was he even desiring to achieve? He received his answers. Loki will return him, Rin, and Jaken when the magic gate reforms. These humans and Gods have neither want nor need for his expertise. It was truly an exercise in futility. Let their realm fall, or not. Loki could escape to another distant realm, rebuild, or not. He could search for his kind in the meantime. His people, who would not look upon him as a novelty, nor a pawn in a game, but as his true station of Lord.

Bakusaiga began to sing.

Sesshomaru felt his senses meld, his youki, his sight, smell, touch and hearing. They turned dark, a darkness Sesshomaru could taste. They all melded into a pool, deep and dark yet somehow resplendent.

The pool, endless and smooth, lapped at his now bare feet, drawing him in. He could see his reflection, only his eyes bled fully red and he wore no clothing. All his markings were black and
his stripes ran long and curved across his body like calligraphy strokes.

He stepped into the pool, it felt warm and slightly viscous. Inviting and foreboding in the same breath, or could he even smell the invitation? He tasted the metallic pang with his feet. Blood. Demon blood. Thousands of Demons had to have bled out to create this pool. He waded out into the endless blood pool slowly.

Ever so carefully, as the blood became chest high, he kicked out his legs and floated on his back. The blood, like thousands of small hands tugged his skin, gripped his hair, crept into his ears. The blood lurched and pulled him under suddenly, and Sesshomaru allowed himself to submerge.

Bakusaiga's melody chorused high. He spoke back, mouth filling with blood. He had to find them, his kind. He had to know their fate. All of the Demons.

Ah-Un. A ripple beat out of his heart like a pebble being thrown in a placid lake. He became the pool, his whole body liquefied. The hands had their prize.

Inuyasha. Another ripple...ripple.
Kagura. A third ripple...ripple.
Bokuseno. Ripple…ripple.
Totosai. Ripple...ripple.
Myoga. Ripple...ripple.
Kouga. Ripple
Kirara. Ripple
Shippo. Ripple
Mother. The ripple hit an invisible edge and bounced back, echoing. His mother? She remained in this realm?! Where?

The pool glowed red, and began to drip upwards towards the black sky, he began to drift up with it. Above him he saw two wide golden eyes glow.

A girl formed in the sky, young, Rin's age, yet clearly a Demon. Her white hair pinned up in twin tails on her head billowed out like streamers above her pointed ears. Her golden eyes shone with a cunning glint, but still held a wide, childlike shape. She had the same markings he did, except all her markings were violet, even the moon and she had only one stripe on each cheek. She even wore the same outfit he did, only where his was red, hers was a matching violet, and she had no fur nor armor. Around her thrashed a familiar green aura.

"Hello Father! It is I, your beloved Bakusaiga, the most powerful weapon in existence! I heard your despair! I have been awakened, and I shall guide you to where Tenseiga cannot." Bakusaiga's voice tinkled like a bell and she tilted her chin high with pride. He felt himself stand in front her, yet somehow still liquefied.

"Bakusaiga. Father? What… is this?" His voice didn't come from his mouth, but rather echoed from everywhere and nowhere.

"Father, this is our destiny. Together the three of us cannot be defeated! United we are the
strongest entity in existence, yet we must go to Grandmother. Right Tenseiga?" Bakusaiga's clear voice held a honed arrogance. She dramatically gestured next to herself and appearing next to her was another tall figure, as tall as he.

Built solidly and tan, he too had golden eyes, yet his white hair was pushed back and fell and flipped out over his shoulders, just like Loki’s. His face had no markings but atop his head perched a pair of triangle ears like Inuyasha's, designating him as a Half-Demon. He had a strong jaw, straight nose, high cheekbones and his intelligent eyes were friendly and warm. He donned a different outfit, the top being one that Loki preferred from his distant realm with pointed shoulders, blue and white with intricate designs, while his pants were the ones his father and he typically wore. He had no visible aura around him.

"Greetings my Lord, I see you have become quite troubled. You must trust in these good humans and the Gods. Bakusaiga, while young and a bit irate, will guide you in the Astral Plane." Tenseiga smiled and bowed, his voice warm like the blood he himself had dissolved into. Sesshomaru stood speechless, never had he thought his swords had humanoid forms. Bakusaiga looked just like him, and Tenseiga a strange hybrid of his father and Loki.

"Trust, in the humans? Tenseiga, you are a half-Demon?" Sesshomaru heard his thoughts come out in drips. Tenseiga merely nodded and smiled, triangle ears flicking out in acknowledgement.

"You give them too much credit Tenseiga! Your love for those weaklings almost caused harm to my father. Your. Lord." Bakusaiga hissed, turning her attention back to Sesshomaru. "That magic wielder, an incapable imbecile, has gotten you into a terrible plight! Yet, I suppose I must credit him since it was the magic gate that awoke Grandmother's gift in you." Bakusaiga yelled and pointed at Tenseiga who merely face palmed.

"Please do refrain from referring to one of my forgers as an 'incapable imbecile' Bakusaiga. He is most intelligent and as you said earlier, this is my Lord's destiny. Their friendship is a key part of that destiny. Do respect that and the rest of his companions. Oh and don't bite him again." Tenseiga's smooth, placid warm voice attempted to extinguish Bakusaiga's anger.

"He hit me! My Father said for that fool not to touch me and that uncoordinated, clumsy magic user hit me! I hope that archer turns him into a porcupine Demon! He is the only human there with any sense at all! And don't get me started on that hammer Mjolnir. That oaf swinging that dull hunk of metal like it could seriously damage me. Ha! I'll best that stupid mace yet. Father, after this quest you must wield me so I can defeat that weak Mjolnir." Bakusaiga punched her small clawed fist into her other hand, eyes set. Tenseiga simply smiled and shook his head.

"You bit Loki?" Sesshomaru blinked.

"I think we've confused our Lord; this is the first time he has truly met us." Tenseiga's triangle ears popped up. Bakusaiga nodded, walking towards Sesshomaru.

"It's ok Father, Grandmother will explain everything. She has sought you for a long time now, she kinda became obsessed. You must find Grandmother before her tomb becomes silent and desolate." Bakusaiga grabbed Sesshomaru's left hand and kicked up, returning to her sword form. Instantly he found himself, still in the blood pool, but stars and astral bodies glittered and swirled around him, all murmuring and velvet soft.

"This is the Astral Plane, don't worry, Grandmother will guide us to her." Bakusaiga returned to her humanoid form, standing beside Sesshomaru as the stars bled out and another image appeared.
He saw another human metropolis. Smaller, with snow covered mountains in the background and a large, square white elegantly spired building. He smelled salt, and saw a vast expanse brilliant flat white earth. He felt grit beneath his claws and bones beneath his feet, different bones but from one body, all smooth and worn. He smelled his mother's hair, felt the silk of her tattered kimono, he palmed a white haired skull and...

A strike on his backside.

Tenseiga immediately disappeared and he saw Bakusaiga cry out before she too vanished.

Sesshomaru's eyes flashed open. The pool gone, he stood face to face with a mask of armor.

Threat.

Startled, his senses failed to fully snap back from being on the Astral Plane. He reacted on instinct and backhanded the armor but failed to properly assess his surroundings. Unknown entities to his front, Rin and Jaken to his left. Vulnerable. Utilizing his full speed, he bounded, scooped up Jaken and Rin, pivoted and leapt to strategic high ground, atop the Quinjet.

"He's fast!" He heard a male voice.

Sesshomaru, for the first time in a long time, was completely perplexed, his mind a jumble, he couldn't even concentrate to produce his toxin or his youki. He felt his stomach go inside out.

Restrain the armored threat. Sesshomaru couldn't focus. What could be use? Pelt?

He summoned his pelt and it twined around the armored man sending him to the ground.

"This is why I cautioned you not to startle him." His ears twitched. A pained voice coming from the left.

"So." Clanking and whirring of metal sounded and the armored man struggled with the pelt."Worth it for scaring him. Do you need a new pair of underwear Sailor Moon? You look like a boxer briefs guy...Can someone help me with Cruella Deville's coat?!" The voice sounded familiar and a name formulated: Stark. He heard laughter.

'Oh. Yes, he was in the future realm. Reunited with Loki. Rin and her ice cream, intelligent dark eyes, an archer maybe? Something about a Titan? Sesshomaru felt light-headed, but tried to calm his racing pulse anyway. His stomach turned again and he fought the urge to retch, did he swallow the blood? Blood?

"Can you explain what just happened?" A female voice. Potts.

"You gave us quite the scare Son of Taisho." A deep voice sounded relieved. Storm God. Sesshomaru's breathing was labored and erratic, what was he standing on? It isn't dirt or rock.

"Yeah, I thought Demons did the possessing, not the other way around." Another, clean voice affirmed. Bedclothes. Rogers.

"You like horror movies?" A woman's hard voice sounded stunned. Romanoff.

"What in the Nines were you thinking?" Loki cursed. Sesshomaru managed to look his way, seeing a complete image for the first time. Loki's shirt was covered in blood but Sesshomaru could smell no open wounds, he did see arrows on the smooth ground. He felt a tug and saw Rin gazing up at him, concerned, her cheeks wet and eyes puffy.
"Lord Sesshomaru! We are so glad you're alright! You wouldn't respond to anything! You were completely engulfed by Bakusaiga's energy!" Jaken cried and also hugged Lord Sesshomaru's leg.

"Bakusaiga...my daughter?" Sesshomaru murmured, his voice sounding not like his own. And he saw Loki shoot to his feet, looking completely infuriated. He tried to categorize the other human's emotions, were they hostile? Why was Loki here again? Did they spar here? At night?

He felt as if underwater. Under blood?

"What you attempted could have easily rendered you mindless. You cannot go that deep into a scry! Ever! You are fortunate that we were able to reach you through Stark's armor!" Loki's eyes were venomously green and Sesshomaru's mind still muddled, realized he smelt intense fear off Loki.

'Fear for him? Loki concerned for his wellbeing? Scry? The blood pool! Mother! I need to find her. Ah Un. Inuyasha. Kagura. I need to find everyone. I need...' Sesshomaru couldn't lasso his thoughts coherently. He felt jostled, he bent over suddenly and straightened just as suddenly as if his muscles couldn't agree on how to behave. Sesshomaru managed to still himself.

"...Scry? Explain." Sesshomaru uttered, voice garbled. Sesshomaru took a step forward preparing to step down from the jet, ensuring Rin and Jaken remained on high ground. But his vision swam, and his balance felt off kilter, he couldn't smell anything. The sky spun.

He slipped off the slick wing of the Quinjet and barely managed to recover his dignity by landing in a last-second crouch. His stomach had enough, he wretched and all that came out was a torrent of viscous blood.

Tenseiga remained silent, Bakusaiga glowed weakly.

'Something was wrong. Something was very wrong.' Sesshomaru slumped, knowing that these humans would kill him. Perhaps Loki would protect him. Something about an invasion?

"Whoa. He doesn't look too good." The Berserker? He couldn't defend himself against his rage. He would surely perish, he couldn't even transform, had he forgotten how? Sesshomaru flicked his head up and saw the Berserker rushing to his side. He braced for impact as he saw a puff of dark green smoke before his mind swelled and he lost all consciousness.

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Chapter End Notes

Authors Note: this is an AU story, In my fic, the third Inuyasha movie: Swords of an Honorable Ruler, never happened. This is important later on.

Also, the rating on this fic will be subject to change due to explicit sexual content. If you are uncomfortable with sexually explicit content, this fan fiction is on fanfiction.net under the same author name, and will have a tamer version of the sexual content to come.

Thank you for reading, as always I appreciate feedback!

-TL
Tony and the Aftermath

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony and the Aftermath

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If someone had told Tony Stark a month ago he would have to help an escaped war-criminal Demi-God contain a scrying Demon Lord on his helipad he would have asked for some of their peyote.

And yet here he was. Peyote-less.

He didn't get it. He just didn't get how he knew this Demon Lord for one day. Thirty hours, and his life was completely upended. The guy was a worse trouble magnet than himself! Even Pepper would agree.

'In fact, I am sure she would agree that Sailor Moon is probably the only person on this planet who is more of a magnet for mayhem than myself.' Tony reassured himself, remembering how Pepper just shook her head when he finally freed himself of that stupid fur thing.

He thought he was really going to enjoy scaring the piss out of the green glowing Demon Lord by slapping his ass, which looked more a little too good in those jeans. Who looked a little too good in normal clothes, period. Nat wasn't joking about being fashionably late.

What he saw when Sailor Moon's eyes opened, however, didn't make the victory very sweet. In the split second before he was hit, which Jarvis later identified as a backhand, he saw Sesshomaru's usually cold, calm eyes overtaken completely in red. He didn't even have pupils until he blinked again.

Whatever he did, which Loki later identified as scrying, wasn't good. He looked every bit a Demon Lord should while doing so.

In fact, the whole magical Demonic scrying thing wasn't good. He sprinted up to the roof, after Bruce yelled his name. Tony never sprinted, he stopped that High School Gym class. He made it just in time to see Sailor Moon get stuck in a green tornado from the Wizard of Oz, which was a reference Steve understood.

The tornado, and everything else around it, rattled his bones. He probably should have called Fury back to update him on the change in weather, but he didn't. They couldn't have done all that work for nothing.

Pepper and Nat were arguing which could have escalated into a heavyweight UFC title match. Bruce was trying to remain calm, while trying to calm others down, which wasn't effective. Thor and Steve looked utterly clueless. He couldn't blame them, Coachella, so far, was the paragon of calm, cool and collected, this didn't look like his normal 3:00 scheduled activity.

It wasn't until Loki and Clint came to the roof, with Loki looking like a thrown out fondue set where things really got manic. Clint had really let Loki have it, which was probably for the best because Clint had been unusually dark for his typical sarcastic self ever since they scrambled the Quinjet. Loki, however, didn't seem to notice he looked like a dartboard.
Because Loki had lost his goddamn mind. And not in a 'I'm a super villain hear me talk about myself and behold my compensation helmet' way, but in the most, chest clinching, blood thinning way.

Tony doubted he would ever forget the way Loki screamed Sesshomaru's name, and the pin drop silence that followed. No one expected Loki of all people to openly show such fear, desperation and panic toward anyone.

It was pretty awkward.

Even Point Break looked shocked, and he knew their bromance better than anyone. It was then, Tony and the rest of the people knew that whatever Sailor Moon was doing, was probably not going to end well.

Loki, without even attempting to remove Clint's welcoming presents, tried to reach Sailor Moon through the tornado. As a result, he got fired back into the Quinjet, hand bleeding, and the tornado actually spoke something. It even sounded female! Neither Thor nor Loki knew what the twister said and they had All Speak. This was possession level crazy.

Great, he had thought. Tony knew truth could be stranger than fiction but this was pushing the limit.

Loki then diagnosed what Sesshomaru was doing was scrying, but that didn't help anyone feel better. It wasn't until Loki, the tough bastard, called Rin and Jaken, did he then try to pry all of Clint's arrows out of himself.

Jaken informed them that the green whirling tornado was not to be touched due to its immense decomposition energy coming from Sesshomaru's magic sword, Backstreet Boy (or whatever). Like he ever thought he would need that sentence in his life.

Rin just kept shouting his name and sobbing, unwilling to be consoled by anyone. It made Pepper tear up and she wasn't a crier. Even Barton looked torn up, but he was also a sucker for kids, being an uncle of two and all.

Tony recalled he finally had moved closer to vortex to see that Sesshomaru's skin was covered in curled, dark lines. His eyes were closed and the moon on his forehead turned black. However the most petrifying thing was he was chanting some archaic nonsense.

Point Break, maybe deciding to test his 'Storm God' title, tapped Mjolnir against the tornado realizing that the energy had no effect on metal. Capsicle was about to get his shield when Loki cautioned them that they had to awaken Sesshomaru gently, not with a shield to the face.

And that's when Iron Man, badass incarnate, made his appearance and saved the day. Sorta.

'Because now I'm carrying an unconscious, probably radioactive Demon Lord down to substorage room 3-b. Because God (gods?) forbid Loki would think he'd feel more comfortable in, oh I don't know, an actual furnished room.' Tony grumbled, face plate up, suit still on, carefully holding the Demon Lord as they exited the elevator, because his Backstreet Boy sword was still kinda glowing green.

Maybe he should just fill the whole damn room with crates.

Carrying Sesshomaru bridal style, which he was definitely going to use as blackmail after this with Jarvis' recordings, allowed him to look at him up close. His markings, which had changed to black and wavy when he was scrying had now turned back to normal. The markings were precise and
somehow just the right color for his ivory skin, including the newly discovered stripes on his triceps.

And yes, when his hairbrushed up against his face, it felt inhumanly silky smooth. Just as he thought it would. Not that he really thought about such things.

His full lips were slightly parted, crimson eyelids closed with thick black eyelashes and Tony could easily kill him right here, turn Loki into SHIELD or Asgard, if they could figure out how to contain him, and be done with all of this.

But where would the fun be in that?

Plus, Pepper would definitely purposefully destroy Stark Industries from the inside out if he made Rin cry, who was walking behind him, along with Loki and Jaken down to substorage room 3-b.

'These really aren't the parades I'm used to being in. Mayhem-Magnet Demon Lord.' Tony heard Rin say something.

"She thanks you for helping Sesshomaru. She wants to know what your favorite ice cream flavor is." Loki translated wearily and Tony couldn't help but smile. The kid was too cute.

"Tell her don't mention it." Tony answered. Loki translated back to Rin and she responded.

"She insists to know." Even Loki sounded at his limit. Tony glanced back to Loki, he was still shaking and looked like a raw hot-mess. Tony knew he could, just like Sesshomaru, probably kill Loki. Not that he would, he'd rather not get that disapproving look from Steve and a hammer to the face. Tony, also, for whatever reason, believed Loki. Believed in a way that surpassed the logical workings of Natasha's argument.

'Loki, as crazy as it sounds, has someone he cares about, and is risking his neck for him and this supposed invasion. Loki isn't stupid, he knows that Sailor Moon's terrifying power and Point Break's family nostalgia are practically the only reasons why he is still alive, much less not at SHIELD. Nat and I can only convince the others so much. With Sailor Moon down for the count, and Point Break on the verge of beating his head in, he really should have teleported away by now. Instead, he is shot to shit by Clint, not leaving Coachella's side, and placating a little Japanese girl about ice cream flavors. Loki has either lost it, or he is serious. Nah, probably both.' Tony mused to himself, not liking the corner he had reasoned himself into.

"Fine, demanding little brat. Chocolate!" Loki translated as they came upon the door.

"She is satisfied with that answer. I'll remain down here." Loki sounded exhausted, and looked like shit warmed over. Tony didn't argue the point as Loki, and Rin walked into the room. He gingerly placed Sesshomaru on the cement and Jaken waddled in with his fur pelt.

He looked almost too peaceful lying down, like this was really unnatural for him. Tony, if he didn't know any better, would say he looked fragile. Especially in normal clothes he looked almost too slender, like being a blood thirsty warrior wasn't really his shtick. He looked more like an arrogant aristocrat, one whose portrait belonged in a French Museum. All Hoity Toity, fur included.

'Oh yeah, I'm going to be getting fur out of my suit for weeks. And Natasha better delete that photo of me tangled in it.' Tony watched as the quartet settled in, Toady nesting them all in the pelt, immediately began to prop Sailor Moon up on the wall. He failed until Loki helped him.

"Oh, Toady, I want my AC/DC hoodie back. You can't wear a band hoodie if you don't listen to their music, it's in the Constitution." Tony pointed at Jaken who ignored him. Tony didn't even
know where he got it from, it had to have been Pepper.

"I like this garment and I shall listen to this band if I can keep it! Now be gone! Lord Sesshomaru
needs his rest!" Jaken shook his creepy staff at him and Tony just realized he got told off by a toad
in his own house. His tower was really torn upside down.

"Hey watch it, there are a ton of French restaurants around here who could make soup out of you." Tony pointed at Jaken and he swore he heard Loki's dark chuckle. He gave up and went back
upstairs to see everyone waiting for him. He took off his suit, that battle over, now on to the next. He poured himself a secret shot and a half of Blue Label before meeting up with everyone. He really, really needed a fix.

"Sooo...back to our regularly scheduled programming. Nat and I have something to show you. What you've all been waiting for. The Superbowl. We will show it to you just the way we saw it, halftime show and all." Tony clapped his hands, suddenly feeling antsy. Probably because now it was time to explain why he and Natasha had decided to deceive everyone, including Fury, that their new house guest was indeed a war criminal. Well, their house guest did also exist…never mind.

Natasha was sitting on the arm of the chair on which Sesshomaru's leather jacket lay. Next to her was Pepper. They had cooled down Tony supposed. He knew they would come around, it had been a long day and it wasn't even happy hour yet.

Thor stood with his arms crossed, a clear 'This better be more important than pissing off my Allfather and him grounding me' stance.

Steve looked a little pale, like he just got over Delhi belly from a shady shawarma spot. He stood resolute in a blue long sleeved shirt and sweatpants. His knuckles looked a bit beat to shit, he took out his anger the old fashioned way, just his style.

Clint slunk like a dark shadow in the back of the room.

Bruce was the only one who appeared interested without looking like he wanted to tear someone's head off...ironically. Well, at least he had one person who was in his corner.

"Now remember class, save all questions for the end of the movie. Keep your hands and feet inside the vehicle at all times." Tony brazenly tried out his best instructor voice.

"Just play the thing Tony." Clint's voice sounded dark and tired and Tony rolled his eyes muttering "buzzkill."

"Jarvis play sequestered footage, just the way Nat and I saw it." Tony spun his finger.

He had shown Pepper the video earlier, and she obviously didn't like it. She made her opinion of 'I don't care what he has to say, I still don't like Loki. But we should probably listen to the Demon Lord anyway, just to be safe.' pretty clear. After the scry-baby episode she didn't think it was good to have an emotionally unstable Demon Lord in the house and gave him a number to a 'good' psychiatrist.

He doubted Sailor Moon would jump for it.

He watched his comrades' facial expressions cycle through a colorful array of reactions and emotions ranging from disbelief, to epiphany, to shock, to captivation to dread.

Except Clint, who remained shrouded in his piss poor attitude.
Tony stopped the video before showing the fight.

"Alright guys, halftime show. What does the class have to say about the movie? Hmmm let's start with Bedclothes in the back!" Steve mustered a good natured frown at the joke before settling back into seriousness.

"If Fury, if SHIELD, knows that Loki can't be contained I fear they'll try to execute him. I can't say I agree with that." Steve sounded deflated, like this was all out of their league, and really it was. Tony had the same idea, and had an idea that Asgard maybe did too. Tony darted his gaze over to Thor, immediately regretting not making that shot and a half into three shots.

"I prohibit my brother's execution. I fought against it on Asgard and I shan't stand by it here!" Thor clenched his fist and Natasha nodded, seeing that reaction coming. "Especially that this Mad Titan, Thanos, is notorious in Asgard as well the other realms beyond for his thirst for devastation and genocide. He harbors the reputation for annihilating planets for sport. He is not a being to be trifled with." Thor added gravely, looking as if a storm would brew.

"What was Loki's punishment in Asgard? Like, what was he subjected to? It sounds like Sesshomaru said he could disappear to wherever he wanted, whenever he wanted, and yet he stayed in Asgard. And now he comes back here, probably the worst place he could, to risk it all." Bruce asked leaning back, brain working overtime. Tony thought Bruce would be the first person to reason through it all.

"I was not privy to the details of his sentence only that he was to feel the pain he inflicted upon Midgard. Whatever the Allfather judged I trust it to not be too brutal. Why do you ask?" Thor replied and Tony felt a pang of anger. What Thor just relayed sounded like torture, but what was he supposed to say?

He had been on the receiving end of torture in Afghanistan. 0 out of 10 would not do it again. His mind flashed to his lungs burning, water in his ears, chest collapsing in inescapable panic. Tony exhaled sharply and deeply, forcing the memory from his mind, he hadn't had an attack in months, he wouldn't get one here.

"Ok. Well, I ask because if he wasn't just sitting licking his wounds, and he was being...uh punished, and he could escape at any time..." Bruce led, waiting for someone to pick up what he was laying down.

"Then he was literally accepting the punishment given to him. It's possible he feels he genuine remorse." Steve finished, eyes lighting up. Tony, for once agreed with the idealist in him, why else would Loki intentionally stay? I mean, he stayed either because he felt genuine remorse, or was trying to give himself credibility for Asgard to believe him.

He heard Clint snort.

"...The hazard and risk to bring Son of Taisho to this time is quite tremendous. Traveling through time is not something the Bifrost is well known for. My brother took a grand gamble bringing him here." Thor sounded serious and thoughtful and Tony perked up.

"Risk? Odin did all the work." Tony spoke up, throwing in the towel and getting up to make himself a much needed second drink. He ignored Pepper's bitter look, he had to get another fix in him.

"I mean not for my brother; for Son of Taisho. He is a mighty warrior, yes. But the Bifrost could have easily shredded his mind and body apart travelling through space and time as it has all others"
before him. If I am certain of one thing of my brother, even after all this time, it is that he has great admiration and ardor towards Son of Taisho. His friendship with him is axial. Loki would know this risk of the Bifrost. I dared not mention it in front of Son of Taisho as I wanted to confirm with Allfather just to be sure, however upon seeing my brother in this video, I know it is true." Thor articulated, looking down, as if struggling with something.

Tony hadn't even thought of that, he finished pouring his scotch.

'The equivalent of me risking Rhodes or Pepper. I couldn't do it for anything less than absolute annihilation. If I were a three toed sloth I still wouldn't use all my fingers to count the scenarios. This one...well maybe.' Tony took a deep swallow of his Blue Label, not caring about what the others thought.

"Oh wow." Pepper, too, deep in thought, furrowed her eyebrows. Tony hated it and told her it would cause her wrinkles.

The room fell silent. They witnessed Loki panic as well when Sesshomaru fainted from the Quinjet. No one could have faked that reaction, and if he had Natasha would have spoken up by now. Thor's point was solid.

"I've studied the video and the only thing I can read, between Pretty Boy and Glow Stick, as a lie is when Loki says Odin won't return him to his own time. Everything else looks like it may be legitimate. Oh, and also when he says you two aren't brothers. That's a bit forced." Natasha relayed, looking Thor in his eyes and he appeared a little placated.

"I can...see how there was probably someone else out there who was leading the whole invasion. Someone in the back, not on the front lines doing the dirty work. The probability of the Chitauri having a leader who sent in a general for an invasion makes more sense than the commander doing it himself." Steve gestured the positions of armies with his hands.

"Who's to say this whole thing wasn't planned and they're both manipulating us? That they're going to turn on us? That Loki risked everything to bring Fancy Pants here to just kill us, and we found Fancy Pants before he did?" Clint's voice was gravely with skepticism.

"Aaaand, that's why it's Halftime. Show the rest of the game. Go Jarvis!" Tony motioned a rim shot air on air drums.

"Right away sir." Jarvis blipped, starting the video from where Loki had appeared in a puff of smoke.

The fight started and Steve, Thor, Bruce and Clint were not very impressed.

"So no offense Tony we know how they fight. I mean, the daggers are new but still." Bruce scoffed, feeling patronized. Clint made a motion to leave the room. Even Thor looked bored.

"Oh, yeah you're right, sorry Jarvis play the video at full speed." Tony wore a shit eating grin.

The video started over and this time Steve shot to his feet in shock. Clint paused and Thor had a startled gaze on his face, and one could almost say a brotherly pride and a hint of betrayal.

"I think it's safe to say if they wanted to turn on us, they'd have done it already." Natasha leaned forward. "Think about it, Pretty Boy didn't even attempt to attack Clint, Bruce and I with his whip, and he in no way moved that fast in New Mexico. He was holding back. Also, I doubt his swords are for show. You heard what Kermit said, that vortex of energy came from Pretty Boy's sword, the one Loki didn't make." Natasha looked to Clint in particular. Tony, also, forgot that
Sesshomaru even had swords and didn't use them. He didn't use them against Loki either, which, when sparring made a lot more sense than a whip.

'Great, so he had N*sync and Backstreet Boy swords that have god knows what power stored in them. I should have definitely tried to take them from him when he was knocked out. Who knows what they are capable of.' Tony kicked himself, he supposed he could go back down there again, but hesitated, thinking the moment already passed. He had other stuff to work on.

"Exactly how is Loki moving that fast, and fighting that well? Didn't Sesshomaru say he was injured?" Steve looked to Thor expectantly. Others followed suit, putting Point Break on the spot.

"I mean, we've all seen how fast Sesshomaru can be when properly motivated, the guy was barely a blur after his meltdown today, but I never would have thought Loki was on par." Bruce stood up with Steve, studying the screen, using his glasses to point at it.

"Thor why didn't you advise us Loki could fight like this? He didn't even attempt to attack us in this way three years ago." Steve asked, clearly confused. Tony had to admit, it sounded like Thor left out a lot when it came to his brother. Maybe that would be a question for another day.

"It has been a long while since I've seen my brother fight with such passion and intensity, I had forgotten. I do not even remember if he has sparred like this with me." Thor looked as if he was thinking of something deep and expression darkened moodily, which was never a good thing for the meteorologists.

The rain started.

"They're skilled, and they have been sparring together for a long time. They don't leave themselves many openings for attack at close range. Pretty Boy's weakness is he has no long distance attacks, Glow Stick's is that he can relies too much on his teleportation which Sesshomaru abuses here and back at 2 minutes 23 seconds." Natasha analyzed like a sports commentator as they watched the fight end. Clint, now paying attention, squared up to the screen.

"Still, what Loki was saying about Sesshomaru's sword? A sword that can bring people back to life?! What a power to have." Steve put a hand under his chin, clearly thinking about someone in particular.

"Loki would be right though, if something like that were to exist, people, countries, even SHIELD would stop at nothing to have it. A blessing and a curse at the same time." Bruce, ever the devil's advocate, reasoned.

"I need to figure out what Sesshomaru's energy is doing to Loki's magic." Tony said to no one in particular, rubbing his beard. The itch to get into his workshop worked through his veins.

"The two energies, if of equal power, neutralize each other out. It is why Loki could not aid Son of Taisho during his scry." Thor supplied. Loki's magic had to have been too low to counter the sword…thing. Tony then got an idea.

"So. Just so I can make sense of all of this, Loki has been able to escape Asgard this whole time, but doesn't. He instead stays, accepting his punishment trying to convince Asgard that his former commanders are coming to Earth. They don't listen and instead he convinces Odin to summon his best friend, risking his life with the Bifrost, to present day. He does this to meet with Sesshomaru, in the city that he nearly decimated, to ask him to convince his enemies that not only is an invasion is coming, but he lost the first one on purpose." Bruce rubbed his eyes, clearly tired.
"Well, not only that, but to ask him to help lead the strategy to beat Thanos. Loki doesn't even mention trying to win us over; he just wanted us to trust Sesshomaru." Steve sat back down, exhausted.

"Logic dictates that we should at least hear Pretty Boy out. Glow Stick took an awful gamble and he isn't the kind of guy to risk his well-being by coming to Stark Tower for nothing." Romanoff finished.

"Sure. Why not." Clint threw his hands up in a sign of defeat.

"Alright let's all take a break, or something. It's been a shit-show of a day. When sleeping beauty wakes up we will pick his brain, or maybe what's left of it, about Loki's strategy." Tony tried to sound casual, but he secretly hoped the Demon Lord hadn't lost his marbles, even though he threw up what had to be three pints of half coagulated blood on his balcony. Yeah, that was gross. Hopefully Sailor Moon isn't a vegetable.

Again where would the fun be in that?

Everyone splintered off, needing space, a drink, another drink, a reality check, some normalcy. Tony practically sprinted to his workshop.

If he could analyze Sesshomaru's energy, like he did Loki's magic, he could track Sesshomaru's energy as well. Actually, it should be pretty damn easy.

In fact, he could make his own proximity barrier, only instead of detecting incoming threats, he could detect magic and Sesshomaru's energy as well. And if he could do that, then maybe he could construct a barrier large enough to detect when these space ships will show up, for a heads up. Maybe even a magic neutralizing force field if it got strong enough. The possibilities were great.

"Jarvis pull up all energy signatures for Sailor Moon, analyze and get a baseline. We got work to do!" Tony began tinkering away, using his already existing magic scanners.

"Will do sir, analyzing now, it appears that Lord Sesshomaru's youki is indeed diametrically opposed to Loki's magic in terms of both wavelength and frequency." Jarvis informed and Tony spun the hologram.

"Lord Sesshomaru's youki is much like infrared light with a wavelength of 850 nm. The frequency of his youki is around 100GHz. His youki seems to be extensively useful for sensing and detecting since longer wavelengths do not scatter as easily as visible light. Also his youki, being in the infrared spectrum, promotes increased rates of healing, pain relief, and prevents against muscle and bone atrophy." Jarvis explained and Tony nodded, taking another sip of his drink.

"Makes sense, he is some sort of predator, and he does heal quickly. His also youki must work just like thermal imaging, night vision, and maybe even finding astral bodies like stars and dust if he ever wants to be an astronaut." Tony chuckled to himself, the liquor kicking in a bit.

"Loki Odinsson's magic, in contrast, is like ultraviolet light wavelength of around 380nm. The frequency of his magic is around 400THz. His magic promotes reactions like photosynthesis, hardening resins, sterilization and disinfection and also fluorescence like detecting gems and crystals." Tony flipped the hologram in front of him around, putting a hand to his beard.

"Wow, Nat is pretty spot on with the Glow Stick nickname. The treasure questing makes sense, finding crystals and stuff is practically his backyard if his magic works like UV light. The sterilization is also a plus. Also maybe now I can get a house plant and it won't die. Eh. No
probably still will, Pepper long gave up on that idea." Tony mused over the new information. He had no idea that Sailor Moon's youki and Loki's magic were so complex, but making perfect sense at the same time.

"Additionally, Sir, their energies are indeed, almost like acids and bases, but in terms of positively charged ions and negatively charged ions." Tony turned around, so they ionized air? He took another indulgent sip of his scotch.

"Lord Sesshomaru's youki acts as a positive air ionizer, much like air before an electrical storm. His positively charged energy can effect human serotonin levels, cause electric charges, induce anxiety, lethargy, immune deficiencies, and irritability. However, from what I can determine, the infrared nature of his youki prevents the negative effects from occurring unintentionally." Jarvis sounded off and Tony nodded, that made sense, if Sesshomaru was some sort of predator.

"Well, his youki does look like it's meant to damage his enemies, that makes sense if he uses it as weapon on purpose. Good to know I don't have a walking plague in my tower. What about Reindeer games?" Tony switched holograms.

"Loki Odinsson's magic, by contrast, acts as a negative ion generator. His negatively charged magic reduces static electricity buildup, promotes plant life, eliminates pollution, cures infections, improves mental clarity, focus, metabolism and purifies blood." Jarvis informed, and Tony leaned back, the gears in his mind already turning.

"Alright, Jarvis to sum it up, Sailor Moon is a walking rapid healing, thermal imaging, super weapon, and Loki is a walking gem finding, plant making, super nurse." Tony pointed and expanded the hologram.

"Well, sir, as I previously stated there is more to it than just that…" Jarvis almost sounded like he sighed.

"Eh, I like super weapon and super nurse. Let's get to it." The liquor had hit Tony just right and he was in the groove.

Hours passed. Tony smiled in victory. He had just managed to verify a baseline for Sesshomaru's own youki, and applied it to his already existing magic signature locator. It synched up perfectly and verified exactly with what Thor said, Sesshomaru's youki and Loki's magic were on opposing ends of a spectrum. They acted differently, as far as he could tell, Sesshomaru couldn't really make anything with this youki.

But damn if it didn't make the Hulk wise up, maybe it had something to do with infrared light's wavelength being so far from the gamma ray spectrum, or that positive ions incited his anger, overloading it.

"Sir, Dr Banner requests entrance." Jarvis chimed in.

"Sure, go ahead, might as well give him access to the lab while he is here Jarvis." Tony waved in Bruce.

"Hey, we were gonna order Chinese. Want a break?" Bruce sounded calm and Tony relented. He was about to go cross-eyed, he needed to see if Sesshomaru was awake and willing to help him test the new tech anyway.

"Yeah, sure, gotta show you what I got going on later though." Tony left the workshop noting when he entered the living area that Clint was getting his ass handed to him in Mario Cart by
"Remember I get winner." Steve called from across the room. At least Legolas looked chilled out.

"No Mario Cart for you Point Break until you replace the like three thousand controllers you've broken." Tony pointed and Thor pouted.

"Ok, let's get some Chinese. I guess we should ask what the boxcar children want, Jarvis link up substorage room 3-b and let's ask." Tony turned and saw Pepper come out with a stack of paperwork as thick as his fist. She opened her mouth but Jarvis spoke first.

"Sir, Lord Sesshomaru, Lady Rin, Retainer Jaken, and Loki Odinsson are no longer on the premises." Tony jumped and his eyes bugged out. His mind flashed with a bunch of possibilities, none good. Did he take them somewhere off Earth? Could he teleport with other people? Did Loki kill them? He did leave a small child, a toad and a KO'd Demon Lord with a psychopathic God of Mischief. Probably not his most reasonable call.

Maybe Coachella really did lose his marbles and Loki decided he wasn't worth his time. Tony resisted the urge to groan.

"Jarvis, from now on tell me when Loki leaves. I'm gonna go get my scanner, we have to catch Team Rocket." Tony skidded back to his workshop and he swore he could hear Clint ask for his bow.

Bruce followed right behind him along with Pepper.

"I told you not to leave them down there." Pepper scolded and Tony knew he deserved it, security was the most minimum at that level since it didn't have anything of value stored at that level, and no one really ever went down there.

Probably precisely why Sailor Moon liked it so much. Tony kicked himself and grabbed the locator which was hot off the press.

"Ok, next time I have a radioactive Demon Lord and a sociopath sorcerer in my house, I'll put them up in the Master. Besides, this just gives me a chance to try out my new Sailor Moon tracker." Tony held up the location device. The locator itself didn't look like much, almost the size of a smartphone, perhaps a few millimeters thicker.

"What is the range on the locator? If they are too far out, or not able to be located we need to tell everyone, or at least get the Quinjet ready." Bruce looked like he wanted to pass out, but he wasn't green so far so good.

"For Loki, this baby can get his exact reading from around three thousand miles out, then it gets wonky. I'm working on the range. No idea for Sailor Moon, but probably a good deal shorter since his youki's wavelength is shorter than Loki's magic. I'll try finding Loki first." Tony turned on the locator, set it for Loki's signature and started the scan.

Nothing.

"…it didn't work did it? I'd like to state for the record I told you so. Bruce, we need to go." Pepper put the paperwork firmly down on his workshop, knowing Tony hated it. Bruce took in a deep inhale.

"Oh ye of little faith, we can still try to find Sailor Moon, I doubt Team Rocket would split up." Tony, though with a bit of nervousness this go around, set the locator for Sesshomaru's youki
signature.

'Please work, please work, please work.' Tony crossed his fingers under the locator.

"Ping." All three looked at the screen intently, seeing the little red dot bleeping.

"Aha! See, they're here in Chelsea at…Jarvis where exactly on 9th street is this?" Tony asked, suddenly now curious as to where they decided to go.

When Jarvis gave him the exact address and name of the location, Pepper just laughed and said she was going to call Happy and bring additional drivers for everyone. Bruce took a deep breath and went to go get his coat.

Tony really just needed another drink, which luckily they could get where they were going.

Chapter End Notes

I love science, so I hope you enjoyed the basic scientific explanations for Sesshomaru's youki and Loki's magic because it will make sense later! :)

thanks for reading, as always your input is much appreciated

-TL
Loki and the Dinner Party

Loki had seen better days, but to be honest, he had many worse ones too. The worse far outweighed the better, so Loki decided he should keep his spirits up. Loki could not recall a day where such emotional highs were followed by such consuming lows.

His eyes hung heavy from the emotional drain, but by Frigga if he wasn't going to stay awake on guard for Sesshomaru, as he had done for him the night before.

Even if he couldn't put up much of a fight, he could scrape together enough magic to eke out one long range group teleport. He could take them somewhere safe, but he'd rather be here so the Avengers would trust them. However, all that mattered, really, was that he regained his full magic reserves and that Sesshomaru's mind returned.

Which by the Nines it did!

He watched Sesshomaru stir and Rin and Jaken were immediately by his side. Loki held his breath as Sesshomaru's eyes flickered open and he called them all by their names. Rin flung herself at Sesshomaru and he saw his lip curl up slightly.

Loki's shoulders relaxed completely and he unleashed a true smile at his friend which he knew irked him.

'Stupid mutt, almost forsaking himself and as a result Midgard and Asgard for what? An unguided scry? Since when did Sesshomaru even learn the skill?! What did he even need to scry? He should have consulted me before attempting such an art.' Loki's blood got hot over his friend's recklessness.

Loki, though if accused would immediately disavow it, was not a talented seer. His skills and abilities lay in other arts. And again, if accused he would immediately disavow it, he sensed that Sesshomaru's scry was one of the most powerful, if uncontrolled, ones he had witnessed. Loki may not scry, but he had witnessed many, such as Frigga's, in his lifetime.

He gave Sesshomaru a warning glare meaning they would talk about the scrying, Barton, and all the other skeletons in their closet later. Sesshomaru just glared back. Stubborn Demon.

Rin then showed him the pictures she drew of Ah-Un, Inuyasha, some humans he didn't know, but she educated him on. She drew her friend Kohaku a ninja, Inuyasha's lover Kagome a priestess, another ninja Sango, and a monk named Miroku. They all looked like they would positively get on Sesshomaru's nerves, especially the priestess.

Lastly, she drew one of himself, Sesshomaru, Jaken and herself all together. Jaken threatened to burn them and Loki may have spelled his mouth shut.

Sesshomaru praised her for her wise use of color, proportion, and balance.
Loki knew this girl meant a lot to Sesshomaru, and was candidly happy for him. One day he would ask the Demon Lord how their relationship came to be. Maybe during a simpler time.

Deciding to unmuzzle Jaken, his first breath was to say that his Lord Sesshomaru needed nourishment. Being that Sesshomaru didn't disagree, Loki donned a disguise.

Rin being of Japanese descent, he altered his appearance accordingly, changing his eye shape and color and even nose shape and bone structure slightly. For finishing touches, he put his hair up in a top knot, pierced his ears with black studs and glamoured on some Midgardian clothes. Loki hadn't had fun with his magic in ages.

Sesshomaru didn't question the Japanese inspired glamour.

Sesshomaru, did, however shove the paper shopping bag into Loki's hand. He stated, with eyes glimmering in what Loki could positively identify as mischief, that he had to wear what Pepper bought him.

Loki was unamused, but Rin giggled when he explained what the clothing meant.

Loki then, using a bit more of his magic than anticipated, transformed Jaken into a perfect little brother for Rin, complete with bowl-cut, human colored skin, and brown eyes.

Jaken was unamused, but Rin hugged Jaken calling him little brother. Sesshomaru simply tilted his head to the side, lowering his ears. Loki decided to interpret that as a success.

Loki offered to teleport them to the restaurant, but Sesshomaru refused, stating to save his magic and that 'his person' would not be moved by another today. Loki had informed him of Stark carrying him like a woman down to their quarters due to Bakusaiga acting wily and Sesshomaru melted open a crate filled with telescope lenses. After putting Tenseiga and Bakusaiga in magicked drafting paper tubes, they departed.

Sesshomaru was disgusted and tormented by the taxi. Loki thought that Sesshomaru would melt the vehicle with his toxin before they arrived at their destination. Rin also hated it, along with Jaken. Luckily it didn't take long to reach their destination: Old Homestead Steakhouse. A steakhouse, Loki researched, that was renowned in this city for its Japanese Kobe steak, something Sesshomaru would actually eat.

"And what would the little miss be having for dinner?!" Their borderline overly friendly, but conventionally attractive waiter asked. Oh. He could work with this.

"Rin would like the crabcakes, Yuki!" Rin sing-songed as she made crab pincer motions with her hands. The waiter laughed musically and Loki leaned forward giving their waiter a saucy glance.

"She will have the crabcakes." Loki translated and the waiter looked at them warmly. She named him Yuki since he stressed that his name was not to be spoken, and it was close enough to 'Loki' for everyone to remember.

"Aw. Your children are just the cutest things. And so well behaved! You two as a couple work so well!" The waiter gushed and Loki couldn't help but laugh mirthfully, Sesshomaru literally rolled his eyes, something he would only do in his company. Loki knew that flirting with their wait-staff would positively undo him. A fair amount of revenge for surprising him with that scry.

"Why thank you. My partner here doesn't read English well so I'll be ordering for us. We will both have the Kobe steaks, Sho's will be cooked blue, mine medium rare and little Jack over there will have one rare. Oh and a bottle of your best Shiraz, and two grape juices. Thank you, so kindly."
Loki hammed it up with a devilish wink, and the waiter for a moment looked surprised, then wrote something down on his pad and slid it to him and Sesshomaru.

He showed Sesshomaru the phone number, Seth's name, and his invitation for a threesome.

'What did the humans call this? Bromance?' Loki grinned like the Cheshire cat as Sesshomaru shredded a cloth napkin.

"Right away Yuki and Sho! And you'll love the Shiraz! Do, ahem, consider all your menu options for dessert." Seth winked back with equal naughtiness then sauntered away.

"Sho? I thought I made it clear not to use that name." Sesshomaru cut his gaze over, still wearing his red t-shirt, though water droplets had speckled it and caught in his hair. Oh, how had he survived all these centuries without Sho? He was truly an endless source of amusement.

Loki surmised the storm was Thor's doing, it held his special energy, his magic could easily sense it. What caused it would have had to have been the video. He wondered absently what the other Avengers would think of it. Hopefully they thought it out rationally as they should. Well maybe except Barton. He had no idea what Thor would think of it.

'I care not what he thinks of it. Not at all.' Loki looked down, frowning.

"Lord Sesshomaru, I do not agree with this at all! I am not a child of this God! I look hideous and I am certainly not Rin's younger brother!" Jaken protested, pulling at his hair and wincing when he realized it hurt. Jaken squirmed, trying to charge enough youki to burn off Loki's glamour.

"Jack, behave or no meat for you." Sesshomaru said simply and Jaken's human's face paled in horror, either from using his human name, the promise of no steak, or both. Loki chuckled.

Rather too much fun. Loki reveled in these little pranks.

"Lord Sesshomaru, Yuki just called you Sho! No one has ever done that!" Rin announced, and Sesshomaru whipped his damp hair to Loki giving him a death glare, pursing his lips. Loki smiled, all vibrant white teeth and undiluted happiness.

"It's because I'm special and have known Sesshomaru for a long time. Oh, Sho, remember, Thor is not my brother." Loki added as the wine and drinks came out to the table and were poured by Seth who made sure to roam his eyes over Sesshomaru who cracked his knuckles under the table.

"Think not that you are above reproach, Trickster Yuki." Sesshomaru growled and Loki lifted his glass of wine.

"Don't be so surly. Let's cheers to a wildly successful day on Mid-this Earth." Loki's eyes sparkled with sarcasm that Sesshomaru caught. They both knew today was far from any success, He became quite literally target practice from the human he adored, and Sesshomaru expelled at least three pints of blood on Stark's roof. Not a stellar day for neither Demon nor God.

And as they raised their glasses, Rin and Jaken included, bursting into the restaurant like a hurricane was none other than Tony Stark and company. Oh what great timing.

Loki was not surprised; he knew his magic signature could be tracked. It's why he chose his and Sesshomaru's chairs facing the door of the restaurant. That and Sesshomaru loathed not sitting against a wall, paranoid Demon Lord.

Loki just wished he wasn't wearing what he was forced to wear. He took a sip of the splendid
Shiraz as Sesshomaru next to him frowned, his entire demeanor changing from relaxed to guarded. Sesshomaru was surprised they were found. Odd.

"What?! No invite? Some polite house guests you are! More like squatters...is that Toady?!” Stark exclaimed flamboyantly and Loki seized an opportunity to get Sesshomaru back from being so rigid.

"We make a charming family, don't we Stark? Let me introduce myself, I am Yuki Taisho, this is little Jack, Lady Rin and you all know my partner Sesshomaru.” Loki's smile was all teeth and Sesshomaru melted a fork in irritation which did not go unnoticed by Stark. Sesshomaru's hair now completely dry due to the small spark of youki he let loose.

"Strangely spoken from someone whose garment has another's name emblazoned on it. A feckless attempt to make this Sesshomaru jealous?" Sesshomaru countered placidly, sipping his wine and all eyes turned to Loki. Loki even regarded Sesshomaru wide eyed, since when did Sesshomaru openly display such humor? Loki looked to Stark and quirked an eyebrow.

Their laughter, save Clint, filled the restaurant and Pepper gave Sesshomaru a private thumbs-up. That vengeful human woman!

'Clint is still infuriated, it is to be expected.' Loki inwardly sighed, his gaze shooting down, remembering the conversation they had.

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"Stand still and smile for the camera." Loki felt the fire coming from Clint's eyes.

"I won't budge." Loki replied simply, though his stomach churned with acid. Something dire was happening on the roof to Sesshomaru, he could sense his youki surging unusually. However, Sesshomaru was correct. He indeed needed, no wanted, to atone for this.

"I know you're dying to get out of this." Clint sneered, his words twisting into him like broken glass.

"I truly am not. I have wronged you terribly." Loki pursed his lips, knowing Clint, just like everyone else, would not believe the God of Lies. The God of Resentment and Lies.

Clint let the first one fly, and Loki stood as still as frost, like the blue spot on his hand reminded him he was.

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"You can have him Sesshomaru." Banner laughed, tears in his eyes "Though I'm glad you're a fan of the other guy, uh Yuki." Banner was shaking in amusement and Loki felt his skin get hot.

'An incredible Hulk T-shirt. Really of all the boorish things. If a seer had told me that I would not only shapeshift into a Demon Lord, get shot by eight arrows, and dress in a Hulk T-shirt I would have forgone this whole day.' Loki pursed his lips together.

Mayhap. The waiter, Seth, alone may have been worth it.

"Excuse me, your volume is distracting our other patrons, do you have a reservation?” A nameless hostess approached Bruce, skin red.
"Uh yeah, I'm Tony Stark, Iron Man, you know the drill. We're going to join this uh table so can go ahead and put some tables together, and get a bottle of Blue Label and another bottle of whatever they got...and a new fork for Sailor Moon over there." The hostess nearly swooned and faster than Sesshomaru could move she and her cohorts fashioned together enough tables. Stark and his fellow lost creatures placed their orders.

"You know. You should have really told us where you were going." Rogers nagged and Loki saw Sesshomaru tense slightly.

"This Sesshomaru seeks assent from no one." He notified back. Loki inwardly groaned, Roger's personality and Sesshomaru's would get along like a Dark Elf and a Fae, constantly grating.

"No. Not like that, we didn't know if something happened. What if something bad were to happen, like with uh Yuki now here in public." Rogers leaned back, voice strained.

"Your concern for your own safeguard is needless." Sesshomaru dismissed with a flick of a striped wrist.

"We are allies, at least while we get to the bottom of what is truly going on here, but that doesn't mean that you can just up and leave without telling us. Not everyone here in America treats enhanced beings well." Rogers admitted and a quiet fell over the table.

'Did the Captain America just regard me in a friendly tone? Could he actually be rallying to his side?' Loki didn't hide his puzzled look.

'In fact, this whole dinner thus far is far too carefree considering all that has happened. I've killed hundreds of mortals, perhaps wounded three times as many. I made their own comrade betray them, I almost assassinated that Agent Coulson who likes him so. And yet he and the rest of the Avengers sit here, eating steak and conversing with Sesshomaru and I as if we are allies.' Loki began to shift uneasily, could this all be a trap? Could they have SHIELD agents converging on their location? No. too public, they wouldn't want to risk another public battle. Would they?' Sesshomaru sensing Loki's unease, pricked his ears up, as if listening for something.

'If they could just wait a few more moons, they will have my blood. They will have their fallen villain of Midgard written with an end date beside his age on their scrolls of history.' Loki faked a smile, a practiced slice of the lips.

"Brother, do you truly relinquish our family name or is this just simply a jest?" Thor thundered and Loki face palmed. So that's why he was quiet all evening, he was upset over the joke about his last name? Did Thor not even know that about his prison sentence?

"Thor, I did not relinquish our family name. Odin himself took it from me, along with many other effects and virtues." Loki explained, taking a large gulp of the Shiraz which now tasted quite sour.

Sesshomaru's face revealed no emotion, but Loki saw his red ears flick up in shock.

"Allfather wouldn't dare take your name! That would be tantamount to rescinding you title as a Prince of Asgard, and the protection of the Royal Guards of Asgard, and your history in our family tree." Thor leaned back in his chair, and Loki chuckled darkly, green eyes never leaving the clear blue ones.

"Oh yes Thor, he took it. It is as how you just implied. My title, my name, my identity, all erased. Disowned. I am but a mere conjurer…what would the Warriors Three and Sif suggest? Ah, yes, a conjurer of cheap tricks. I am bereft of all but few possessions, and even fewer means of regaining
any solace of a home." Loki felt eyes bore in on him, but he cared not what these Avengers thought of him. He had lost all chance of anyone caring about his well-being, save Sesshomaru and deservedly so.

His soul had been reduced to a mere transient specter intent on one goal, to completely dismantle Thanos’ Navy and to do onto the Other what was done onto him. Loki, if to be accurate, did not even consider himself to be truly alive anymore. In his time in the prisons of Asgard he managed to cobble his soul back together only to realize he coveted no purpose to create, no purpose to rebuild, nor revel in happiness. He existed only to destroy a singular target. A weapon certainly didn't need to be alive.

Loki simply wanted to see the Other dismembered, to see his skin peeled from his muscle, his sinew flayed from his bone, flesh shredded to ribbons, his bones snapped. He wanted to look into the Other's eyes, glassy in pain and recognize that he was a force to be reckoned with, and he was no mere puppet of Thanos. He was Loki, a strikingly strong sorcerer, and no one would take that from him again.

"Allfather never told me such. What else was your edict for your punishment? I cannot believe that he would simply take your name." Thor's voice lowered and Loki huffed in exasperation.

"Thor, perhaps you should ask your beloved Allfather, you truly cannot believe my words, yes? I can assure you that what I endured was suitable for what I ravaged upon Midgard if that is what truly troubles you." Loki supplied and caught a movement from Sesshomaru, clearly transfixed between the exchange, like the other Avengers. There was a strained silence.

"...your brother has sustained profound wounds both new and old. Your ignorance of his treatment stands contrary to your professed concern." Sesshomaru broke the silence, slicing a critical stare to Thor's direction. Thor looked positively enraged and a clap of thunder was heard.

Loki swallowed another gulp of wine, then refilled his glass and Sesshomaru's. How many of his wounds and of what type did Sesshomaru sense?

"Lord Sesshomaru, a King who imprisons, tortures and renounces one of his sons for a failed invasion? Why not just send him away for education? It's what the Lord of the Southern Lands did with that one savage daughter of his. She returned much smarter! What good does a noble's persecution do in failure? Bewildering Gods!" Jaken waved his hands and Sesshomaru merely glanced blandly in his direction, before nodding in agreement. Loki had to hide his amusement, the little Water Demon was his unintentional advocate. Of all the things....

"Humans torture too Jaken, I mean Jack. Rin thinks humans are the worst, not Demons! Especially bandits!" Rin supplied and Thor, Romanoff and Loki looked her way.

The rest of the table glared at Jaken, who remained completely oblivious and Loki couldn't help but think it hilarious. The tactics from their warring period were certainly different. War and dominions have changed so much since the time when Demons roamed Midgard. Loki knew he deserved the punishment he received, yet the isolation he felt was completely disowned still shrouded him.

He had to regain his honor. Even if he, himself only, witnessed its recapture.

'Truth be told, I not only do not expect surviving, the encounter with the Other, I do not relish it. It'd be far more effortless to simply cease to be after his obliteration, and I know of few who would mourn my fall. Most would outwardly and proudly rejoice it. I am surrounded by most people who would raise a glass in merriment to it.' A quiet, hollow pain panged deep in Loki’s sternum.
Perhaps he had been a modicum selfish in bringing Sesshomaru to this time and realm.

'It is warming to be reminded of what was. And to have someone, when I expire at the end of my excursion of vengeance, who will remember me not just a sorcerer or Prince who squandered great potential, but once lived it.' Loki stole a warm glance over to his friend, whose youki began to ebb out in agitation. He clearly didn't like the current conversation.

"Dear Jack, criticize not the justice of Asgard." Loki turned the rest of the table before Thor, or anyone else dared input anything else. "I am assuming you watched our conversation, yes? It matters not if you lot ever harbor any respect or find my character or company amiable, what matters is that you take seriously the eminent threat that nears. After we deal with the Mad Titan and his wrath, you may do with me as you see fit." Loki, Jaken and Stark noticed Sesshomaru's cutting glance towards Loki, talons lengthening as he destroyed yet another fork.

Sesshomaru, again, clearly did not fancy that idea either. They severely needed a change in conversation. Rin bit her lip, upset and on the verge of saying something.

"Hey Pretty Boy, gotta ask, what was going on with you on the helipad?" Romanoff steering the conversation his way, most likely due to Rin, Loki noticed a softening in her gaze when looking at her.

"Actually, can someone explain to me what scrying is? Or I'm just going to assume it's an emo Skrillex remix." Stark threw his hands up predictably.

"Scrying is a method practiced mostly by seers to either find an entity, item, or to see the future. Usually they use some sort of reflective surface to view the Astral Plane. Scrying is profoundly difficult to develop as a skill, at least effectively." Loki educated and saw Sesshomaru go deep in thought.

"Of course, aliens and now fortune tellers. Can you scry us some lottery numbers?" Barton derided from the far end of the table, and Banner shot a warning look.

"Well, I am first a sorcerer, not a seer. I do not have much practice in the arts arcane...now arts profane..." Loki trailed off and Thor asked a question before Barton could retort.

"So, son of Taisho, what did you see? The future?" Thor asked, one track mind.

"...it is of no consequence." Sesshomaru finally answered, not looking at anyone.

"Listen, I rescued your creepy chanting ass from your radioactive tornado from hell...on my own roof! I think we all deserve to know what you were trying to conjure." Tony leaned back, waiting to be impressed

Loki felt his throat get tight. Sometimes scrying could be very personal or confusing, especially as unpracticed and unruly as Sesshomaru's was.

Wait.

"Why did you start to scry?" Loki heard himself ask and Sesshomaru's eyes shot to him, he looked like he was about to leave. Loki hadn't even thought of the question until now. What had Sesshomaru decided was so important he had to scry at that exact moment, and with no reflective surface?

"Bakusaiga." Sesshomaru spoke one word.
"You started to scry because of your sword?" Romanoff finally spoke up.

"...Bakusaiga, she is volatile, stubborn, deadly, and she's quite young. Only her sheath is to be touched." Sesshomaru stated, but his mind sounded miles away, he didn't even properly answer Romanoff's question. Loki knew then that Sesshomaru sounded as if he was still training with the sword.

"Ok, it's just a sword. How can it have a personality? Much less one that sounds like someone we all know?" Barton asked. Loki shrank, knowing he was speaking of him.

"You fools! Bakusaiga is no normal sword! It came from Sesshomaru's own body in battle against Magatsuhi! It is the sword to surpass all swords! The strongest weapon in existence!" Jaken defended, raising his own steak knife as one would a sword. Everyone around the table looked at their neighbor in confusion.

Sesshomaru shot Jaken a look that could freeze Muspelheim.

'He created a sword from his own flesh? Is that even possible? It would explain why I couldn't get near him during his scry. I had never encountered such a flux in youki before, the sword, if born from him, must amplify his youki.' Loki could see he was not handling this line of questioning well. Loki noticed Stark had backed off, eyebrows furrowed.

What...What did he see to make him this disquieted?

"Son of Taisho you fathered a female sword as well as a mortal?!" Thor asked and Lady Pott's eyes went wide. Sesshomaru clenched his fist, destroying his third fork.

"No silly, I found Lord Sesshomaru! and Bakusaiga came out when Lord Sesshomaru regener-" Rin started, but Sesshomaru put her hand on her shoulder softly to silent her. Loki thought it strange, he usually let Rin speak her mind. Loki made a mental note to ask Sesshomaru of the fifty-three years he missed, it sounded like much transpired.

"I did not start to scry because of Bakusaiga, Bakusaiga began the scry because of my instincts. I did not know what was happening until it already occurred." Sesshomaru's eyes were covered by his bangs as he looked down at the table. Stark sat back, cutting eyes to Thor who shrugged, being of no help to understand what was going on.

'By the Nines, he executed that powerful of a scry inadvertently? Could this be because of the Bifrost?' Loki looked upon his best friend as if for the first time. It would make sense that a magical flow of energy could catalyze such a gift.

"So, you didn't do it on purpose? " Rogers asked quietly.

"It was far from this Sesshomaru's intention to befall such an inconvenience." Sesshomaru's voice almost sounded sardonic as he recovered. Loki felt guilt stab his gut and saw a similar reaction in Stark.

'Befall such an inconvenience, whatever Sesshomaru saw did not sound like it was worth it for the price of appearing vulnerable in front of a potential enemy.' Loki studied his friend warily.

The waiters, Seth included, who looked like he was about explode in awe, appeared with everyone's food. Sesshomaru hid his sorrow well in his face. It was, however, evident in the slight hunch of his shoulders. Loki decided he would wait a spell before inquiring his friend as to what he saw. He knew Frigga would often be perturbed by her dream-seeing.
"Oh man. This was such a better idea than Chinese." Banner smiled putting a forkful of steak in his mouth gracefully and Pepper nodded.

"This is the first time I've had real Kobe beef! Thanks for picking up the tab Tony!" Rogers carved his prize. Loki also enjoyed red meat, it had been a long while since he had food that tasted nearly this delicious.

"Yeah well, not everyone can be a billionaire...speaking of which how were you two going to pay for all of this?" Stark gestured to Sesshomaru and Loki with his steak knife.

"Pay with dollars?" Sesshomaru asked at the same time Loki conjured a black AMEX card.

"Uh, yeah pay. You know give money to someone to get something. You had to have done it for the ice cream. Pepper you gave him a corporate card or something right?" Stark turned to Lady Potts and she shook her head, mouthful of steak.

"Wait. How did you pay for the ice cream?!" Stark looked suddenly interested.

Pause.

"I believe that's an inquiry I did not consent to answer." Loki saw a resurgence of life in his friend, humor dancing in his eyes. The energy level of the table began to rebound as well.

"You've answered everyone else's questions! We aren't even playing that game anymore. Well, whatever, fine we can play just ask me a question, any question, because I so deserve a question. I mean, I can probably answer anything you can think of." Stark feigned indignation, his dark eyes danced back.

Pause.

"I have a pertinent question for you." Sesshomaru relented and Stark punched a fist in the air, chewing on steak.

"Shoot!" Stark swallowed his steak and straightened his spine in anticipation.

"Do you enjoy partaking in the music of a Michael Jackson?" Sesshomaru asked then took a delicate nibble of steak, Loki noticed Sesshomaru avoided using the fork and instead speared it with his knife. He must find Sho some chopsticks, wait.

Loki's eyes went wide, he looked at his friend whose posture returned to normal. Sesshomaru was playing games with Stark. Sesshomaru never played games. He must find Stark of some amusement. Loki knew Stark enjoyed game playing as well.

"Well yeah, I mean he was the King of Pop after all. He isn't my favorite, but the albu...wait what?! How do you know about Michael Jackson and why is that your question of all questions?" Stark, flabbergasted again, nearly dropped his knife on the floor.

"You just love trolling Stark don't you?" Romanoff chuckled.

"I have listened to Michael Jackson. My favorite song of his is 'The way you make me feel'." Rogers contributed.

"You would. Mine's 'Thiller'." Banner grinned, and almost everyone rolled their eyes. Loki noticed Clint hadn't said anything just attacked his steak. Loki's spirits dampened.
"You know; I think my favorite is Billy Jean." Lady Potts mused. Loki wondered if he should chime in that his favorite was 'Smooth Criminal'. Perhaps that would be too soon.

"Ok. Glad everyone answered his question now c'mon Sailor Moon answer mine, why Michael Jackson? I hope you didn't scry him. And how did you pay for the ice cream?" Stark put his hands out to silence the clamor.

"This Sesshomaru will extend benevolence to you and answer both questions. To the first, I bartered with the ice cream vendor." Sesshomaru replied, eyes glimmering.

"Bartered with what? Do people still do that?! What do Demon Lords barter with? A bag of goat heads? Human teeth?" Stark was astounded and Banner and Rogers snorted. Loki took a sip of wine, remembering a time when Sesshomaru and he bartered with a certain Phoenix Demoness, Kira, over a crystal after he lost a duel to her. Loki shuddered, remembering the nickname she gave him.

Perhaps Sesshomaru had long forgotten that nickname, but he doubted so.

"Information. Her wares and in exchange I listen to the following musical artists and opine them. Is bartering common in this realm?" Sesshomaru sat up slightly and began to dig out slips of different paper. He tilted his head to the side as Stark, Lady Potts, Romanoff, Banner and Loki picked up a paper Sesshomaru pulled out.

"No. Not really for typical citizens, but as Avengers we sometimes get some preferred treatment. Like us getting a table in a full restaurant." Rogers admitted, a bit embarrassed to Stark who shrugged.

"Hey Mr. Mysterious, listen to these guys and give me a call or swing back by: Michael Jackson, Nirvana, Whitney Houston, The Counting Crows. -Polly." Stark read out loud "...you got free ice cream because she wants in your pants!" He threw the paper on the table in disgust. Sesshomaru picked it back up immediately, examining the paper.

"Polly does not desire my person." Sesshomaru insisted instantly. Loki just chuckled in amusement.

"Oooh, this number says 'Jean-claude' Sounds like he may be interested." Romanoff announced, turning it over in her hands.

"Mine says she is a Soul Cycle instructor. Cadence how appropriate of a name." Banner added.

"This is a business card for Q Model Management, Jason Sisson, looking for work?" Lady Potts gave an approving look.

"This is the one our waiter, Seth gave us. I am surprised you kept those however, Sesshomaru." Loki contributed, and he swore he saw Sesshomaru's cheeks darken, but it must have been the shadow of the passing waiter. Loki knew that Sesshomaru had little idea of why he received such communication codes, but it tickled him to know that he actually kept them.

"This Sesshomaru kept them for Rin's sake." Sesshomaru said cryptically, not explaining any further, but levelling a gaze at Loki, daring him to explain further.

"Sounds like you have some competition Yuki." Rogers joked, taking a bite of his steak. Loki's eyebrows raised, did Rogers just joke with him? Is the leader of the Avengers toying with him? Loki bit the inside of his cheek to prevent from lashing out; he needed, of all people, for him to take him seriously, not banter with him.
"See Lord Sesshomaru! Those humans were unusually untoward!" Jaken piped up.

"Here, just take one of the corporate cards, Sailor Moon." Stark dug his wallet out of an unexpectedly quite expensive suit. It was then Loki noticed how well-groomed Stark looked. He noticed the way he sat directly opposite Sesshomaru and leaned in to give the plastic credit card to him. Even Loki could smell the subtle whiff of cologne on Stark.

"...I prefer to barter." Sesshomaru answered, tone placid but eyes crinkling just a bit in mirth.

'Oh. Oh this was going to be interesting!' Loki drummed his fingers on the table. Perhaps this patchwork alliance with this hodgepodge of misfits could bring him amusement yet.

"You're impossible! Keep your goat heads and teeth, let's see how far that will take you." Stark pushed his chair back from the table in fake offense. Romanoff's eyes lit up, recognizing the same thing he did.

His best friend, and the man he threw out a window, were flirting with each other. Loki felt his dormant magic surge, devising shenanigans.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! A special shout out to some of my readers: vibs88, Akuma_River, Kiren201, the_Archivist, Caitriona695, Heavenlycosmos, matchynishi, GabxLuci2796, Jennifer, and Lokiismylife27. Thank you for your continued support, constructive criticism, and encouragement! :)

Thanks everyone for reading and leaving kudos, it puts a stupid big smile on my face! I hope all of y'all liked this last chapter.

-TL
Sesshomaru and the Microwave

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sesshomaru and the Microwave

*(*)

Sitting on his tower of crates in the final moments before dawn, Sesshomaru surmised that the past four days went rather productively. He had continued to vaguely torment Stark, while tactfully avoiding most of the other humans and Storm God. He made sure he had a lock on Loki's, Rin's, and Jaken's whereabouts at all times.

He had spent the nights conversing with Jarvis over the historical and technical documents and manuals he requested while watching over a sleeping Rin, Jaken and Loki. Sesshomaru had not liked the way the dinner at the restaurant went five nights prior. He had a sneaking suspicion Loki was hiding much from him.

Sesshomaru also, with Jarvis' help, he was successful in locating a music device, as to research the musical artists Polly provided him.

He meticulously studied the artists and ranked them in order of preference and quality, with Nirvana at the top, then Michael Jackson, followed closely by Whitney Houston, far last were The Counting Crows.

His ears stung and throbbed, but Sesshomaru always kept his word.

The days went about the same, he took Rin to the Park and the Happy Dragon ice cream shop. Thor's friends and Loki were on tentatively good terms, however Loki would often go off on his own for periods of time and Sesshomaru couldn't fault him for wanting to do so. Loki did, however, accompany him, Rin and Jaken multiple times to the park.

He also learned that Stark had the ability to track Loki's magic signature, and his own youki if he kept it at a certain level or higher. While impressive the human Stark could be such an effective tracker in this realm, Sesshomaru knew he could suppress his youki enough to render his device unusable.

Loki, however could not do the same with his own magic which Loki confessed to Sesshomaru the night after the steakhouse dinner when Sesshomaru interrogated Loki on how Stark managed to locate them.

His inability to completely conceal his magic surprised Sesshomaru because he had mastered that skill when he knew him.

It didn't truly matter, however, because Sesshomaru had a backup tactic in place: his proximity barrier. It interfered with any tracking entity, device or otherwise, in pursuing Loki.

He, admittedly, did not anticipate having to rely on that aspect of his barrier for an extended period of time. He did not wish for any potential enemy, or the Distant Realm's all-seeing sentry, to interfere with his initial interrogation of Loki in case the God did, for an unfathomable reason did betray him.
Yet, now he would have to ensure the barrier remained up at all times to prevent their Commander Fury from discovering Loki.

That entire day, five days' prior, the shapeshifting, the scrying, the dinner, Sesshomaru had not cared for any of it. He had a sneaking suspicion Loki was hiding much from him.

He had ascertained that Loki been wounded more gravely than he appeared when they sparred on the helipad, which is why he went easy on him. Some of his injuries seemed quite sinister indeed, sinister not just in the physical.

Either the justice in the Distant Realm fell hard and swift, or Loki had committed a terrible atrocity he had not yet confessed. Sesshomaru suspected the former; he could not admit to being terribly fond of the King of Distant Realm of Asgard. His gleaming favor of his eldest son always struck him peculiar and shortsighted; it only bred conflict and discontent.

Sesshomaru disliked the Distant Realm of Asgard the few times he went, especially the one time Loki was ambushed when Thor was absent.

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"Thor isn't here to protect you, God of Trickery, Mischief and Lies. You've deceived and made fools of us for the last time." Sesshomaru heard a stern, hotly arrogant voice spike from deep in the forest.

This piqued Sesshomaru interest, even though he had been in Asgard with his father on a negotiation mission for the sovereignty of their own lands and realm for five days; he had not seen nor located Loki for his stay thus far. It had disappointed Sesshomaru, Loki was the only reason he anticipated being in Asgard.

Sesshomaru loathed Asgard. He distrusted the gaudy prettiness and their false smiles. He knew they all saw him as Thor originally did, a weak, bloodthirsty, savage simply being humored by their King. Their condescension was thinly veiled and he suspected the only reason they did not send them packing was his father had Sounga, the Sword of Hell.

He had caught many an Aesir regarding Sounga like one would either a trophy to be snatched, or an evil to be destroyed.

Presently, it sounded like Loki got himself into trouble again. Sesshomaru strode towards the forest, to assess the situation.

"Your pathetic woman's arts and strength is a disgrace upon the Aesir! You've gone too far this time changing Sif's hair from blonde to sepia brown!" Sesshomaru continued to walk at a leisurely pace towards the commotion. He knew that the other Aesir in the area could not hear their harsh whispers but being a Dog Demon he could.

Seems that Loki had pranked that Shield Maiden who took a shine to Thor so. Perhaps out of envy, he knew Loki at one time yearned for her favor.

"As I claimed I tried—ahh!" Sesshomaru heard Loki cry out in pain. "I tried to change it back but they wouldn't assist me!" Sesshomaru ears flicked up. Were these Aesir tormenting Loki instead of merely confronting him? Sesshomaru did not usually white knight anyone, however from what he could smell, there were five Aesir and Loki. Not a fight, but an ambush. He crept closer.

"We are sick of your constant lies! Your blatant envy of Thor does nothing but cause trouble and strife for everyone else. It is not Thor's fault he holds your father's appeal, but your own! We are
going to do you a favor, we will help you not act out. Maybe if we took away your ability to get yourself into such mischief you can learn to be a better Aesir." A third voice, thick with malice, sounded out. He didn't particularly like the sound of that. It sounded very much like a promise, not just a threat.

Sesshomaru smelled pine, Loki's magic. He increased his pace, he had to be close to them now, he could clearly smell their individual body odors, their oiled leather and armors. Warriors, five of them. He smelled metal, they were armed. Sesshomaru leapt through the trees, he smelled blood and no longer heard Loki.

"Don't worry Loki, this is really for your own good." Sesshomaru came upon them finally. Loki was being held down by four fully grown warriors, their faces crinkled in hilarity and falsely vindicated violence.

All of Loki's clothes had been torn off, ripped, and thrown across the glade in multiple directions. The fifth has a needle and thread, and had already punctured one hole in Loki's bottom lip, one guard had his jaw slammed shut. Sesshomaru's eyes sliced over to the fifth warrior and with a flick of a striped wrist the needle and thread were melted from the warriors' hand with a noxious green whip.

Inexcusable. He is your Prince. He is my friend. You will all kneel.

"Oh, so your little bitch Demon has come to—" Sesshomaru let loose an invisible flash of killing intent followed by a glimmering red youki wave. All their eyes went wide, including Loki's.

"This Sesshomaru is no woman." And that's all Sesshomaru really remembered because his talons lashed out of his fingers like daggers, his mouth spread open in a wide, wicked, knifed smile. His blood red eyes saw no mercy and his markings promised pain. While he didn't transform into his true form, he couldn't be certain he remained fully in his humanoid form either when his Demon blood took over.

His bloodlust was only satiated when the glade, and himself were soaked in blood. The trees had been strung with sinew, skin, hair, and shredded leather. Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side, he had never cut down warriors of this caliber so quickly, and so thoroughly. He looked down at Loki who stared at him blankly as if he saw a specter.

"You are their Prince, and they should not have addressed me as such." Sesshomaru justified, flicking blood off his claws. This would set back negotiations between his father and the Aesir for a long while yet. Sesshomaru detested the idea of having to tell his father of his work, the warriors had been reduced to flakes of flesh and shards of bone. Sesshomaru frowned.

"I will tell Allfather a great beast, not unlike a Draugr, slew them. We together survived it and it vanished. It isn't a true lie." Loki stood up, magicking on some clothes with a spoken spell. He looked a bit pale and Sesshomaru had no answers for him.

"...very well. After that let us go practice calligraphy." Sesshomaru nodded, planning on letting Loki do most of the talking. It wasn't like anyone would believe he alone cut down five Aesir warriors himself anyway.

Well, perhaps they would. He was nothing but a bloodthirsty savage to them after all.

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Sesshomaru, to this day never figured out what exactly happened in that fight. Loki never spoke of
Sesshomaru had no one to ask why he kept such a secret from him, except looking back he may have rejected such a gift, thinking Loki a madman for helping construct such a backwards blade.

He had no intention of disclosing or demonstrating to anyone in this realm of Tenseiga's true nature. Not even Loki knew of its true capabilities of resurrection. In this realm, due to the documents provided by Jarvis and his own observations, humans had certainly produced powerful and lethal weapons in their revolution of industry.

If Thor's friends, commander Fury, or any human Lord learned of his Tenseiga, they would covet him. They would attempt to take Tenseiga for their own gain, and Sesshomaru knew, while powerful, he would eventually lose a war of attrition against an entire realm. The thought humbled Sesshomaru, and caused a raking, scraping feeling in his gut.

Sesshomaru would have never thought he would have to be this cautious of humans. In his own time, they would have no hope in attempting to steal his birthright, his blessed and cursed gift from his friend.

'They would use Rin and Jaken against me. Using Tenseiga would put them in peril and I have learned my lesson that any action involving Tenseiga is not worth risking Rin's life.' Sesshomaru promised himself, restless with fragmented thoughts. Sesshomaru didn't require much in the way of sleep so he stood guard during a most unremarkable evening on the fourth night.

It was most unremarkable, as most of the nights were, save the night of the steakhouse dinner. The night of the steakhouse, around 1:17 am, Sesshomaru heard someone approach the door of their quarters. Perched high atop his stack of crates, he watched Barton the archer, sans bow, enter the room. He smelled of human spirits. Barton looked around, then up to him, face unreadable.

Sesshomaru didn't smell malicious intent from Barton as he watched a sleeping Loki, propped up against a crate, with Rin curled up in his lap, both wrapped in his pelt. Jaken flopped on his side next to them.

His ears picked up the tired, whispered phrase "I just don't get it." Before he turned to leave.

Strange human, but his plan was working. He and Romanoff departed in the Quinjet for some sort of meeting with the Commander Fury that next morning. He heard the jet fire up and roar off into the dawn sky four mornings ago.

Which brought him to early morning, the fifth day, and this time he decided he would try to investigate the cooking nook of the tower instead of merely bartering or hunting food for Rin. It was also the day that Barton and Romanoff were due back from their time with Fury. He found that Rogers was already up, properly dressed, eating an assortment of unknown human foods.

"You're protective of them." He heard Rogers speak and Sesshomaru ignored him, he didn't explain himself.

Sesshomaru, however, was at a loss. This new human food perplexed him. He opened a metal door, nothing inside.

"That's the oven." Rogers supplied, forking what may be some flat bread into his mouth.
Sesshomaru tried again.

"That's the icebox...I mean refrigerator. What are you looking for?" Rogers stood up, and Sesshomaru eyed him blankly.

"Look, I can relate to what you're going through sorta. I was frozen for seventy years in ice and when I came out everything was different. The girl I loved didn't really know who I was and was obviously old. Everything as I knew it was gone or different, and everything I did seemed just off and people assumed I was uneducated. I don't look down on you for it." Rogers monologued and Sesshomaru saw it as his attempt to relay he neither pitied nor patronized him.

So, against his better judgment, Sesshomaru indulged him.

"I know...once knew someone who was pinned to a tree by a sacred arrow for fifty years." Sesshomaru opened a cabinet finding plates and bowls, useful for future knowledge.

"We should start a club or a support group." Steve looked at Sesshomaru in an attempt at humor.

"He was pinned there by a priestess with whom he had a romantic relationship. They allowed themselves to be deceived by a manipulative Half-Demon." Sesshomaru finally found something that looked like food...Prego? It was some sort of paste, He most likely required noodles for this to be suitable for Rin's consumption.

"What happened?" Rogers leaned forward, all brawn and strength.

"The priestess perished from her wounds. He was eventually released by the priestess' reincarnation. The original priestess was reanimated by the Half-Demon as a clay incarnation and united they fought and slew the Half-Demon." Sesshomaru left himself out of the story for obvious reasons and found peaches. More suitable, but unable to be combined with this Prego most likely.

"That's um quite a tale. Glad he's OK." Rogers took a spoonful of his gruel.

'Was OK.' Sesshomaru corrected to himself, gathering peaches, Prego and olives. Encased in crystal and metal, he was unable to discern how this Prego smelled. He would investigate these food items and get Jaken to prepare something for Rin.

"Son of Taisho! Steve Rogers! Good morn!" Thor greeted as he strutted into the kitchen, all golden smiles, opening a cabinet and grabbing a new box of pop tarts, ripping it open.

"Morning Thor!" Rogers waved back, eating a piece of tubed meat of some unknown origin.

"Allow me to assist with breaking your fast!" Thor grabbed the Prego from the counter and opened a strange box, threw the crystal container and four shiny packets of Pop Tarts inside and pressed a button. Sesshomaru began to scour the kitchen for more useful items, secretly relieved at the Storm God knew how to prepare the Prego.

"Thor I don't think you can put those types of containers in that microwave oven." Rogers warned. Sesshomaru heard the device whir more loudly and became suspicious.

"Nonsense! Jane has instructed me that pastry of toasters can indeed be placed in the oven of small waves!" Thor proudly retorted, turning his back on the device. Sesshomaru smelled smoke.

"Yes, however, I think she meant you had to remove them fro-" Sesshomaru saw lightning in the device, then fire, then he dodged the booming explosion with a quick dive behind the counter Rogers was eating his meal upon.
His ears, already sensitive, popped and rang. The lights in the kitchen went dark with another cracking pop.

"Thor!" Rogers protested, covered in red sauce along with most of the room and Thor's back.

The device was no longer on fire but appeared inoperable. Sesshomaru barely managed to escape unscathed from the red sauce. He would never again trust Storm God to assist in Rin's meals. He would barter outside for her meal today. Sesshomaru stood straight, taking in the slop that covered the walls. It smelled of tomatoes and fire.

His ears hurt, and he felt his balance off.

"I do correct myself Steve Rogers." Thor, humbled, turned to the defeated device. Sesshomaru could barely hear them.

"...of course you would! Capsicle you're fired as my babysitter." Sesshomaru almost jumped in surprise when Stark appeared beside him in nothing but a tunic bottom. He barely heard him!

The human had good muscle definition, and his hair stuck up at odd angles. Sesshomaru studied the lines of his shoulder blades and the curve of his jaw.

"You." Stark pointed at Sesshomaru. "This is somehow your fault...is this tomato sauce? What were you trying to make? 'Blood of my enemies huevos rancheros?' You must be a SHIELD plant to purposely annoy me." Stark, exasperated, put a hand through his hair. Sesshomaru winced visibly, his ears simply stung and his voice echoed strangely in his skull.

"...you are indecently dressed." Sesshomaru observed and Stark's face flushed. Sesshomaru tried to refrain from moving his ears, he couldn't hear much.

"My tower, my rules. When you become a billionaire, you can wear what you want." Stark retorted, putting his hands on his hips, avoiding stepping in the paste that coated the floor along with the broken glass.

"Twas not the fault of Son of Taisho! I misunderstood the instruction of the oven of small waves as ordained by Jane." Thor took a finger and licked some of the sauce from himself. He shrugged as he knelt down to pick up some of the broken glass.

"Life must be cashing in all my bad karma at once. Clean this up, Jarvis reset the circuit breaker for the kitchen." Stark ordered and turned back and looked to Rogers and Sesshomaru. "You two clean yourselves up, you two look like a bad Vietnam War documentary." Stark motioned to another room, Sesshomaru assumed the room must be where these humans bathed since he had yet to find a suitable hot spring or clean stream or river. A strange fortress this tower.

"This Sesshomaru does not have any Prego on his person. I will bathe at my leisure." Sesshomaru informed, not taking any personal hygiene orders from Stark, despite it being his fortress.

"Oh yeah, what's this?!" Sesshomaru shivered as Stark's warm finger slid down his neck and mimicked what Thor did earlier and licked his finger. Sesshomaru shimmied slightly from the unexpected contact. His touch positively ignited his youki.

Stark's face twisted in revulsion.

"Oh what in Einstein's hell did I just do? Is this blood?! I hate mornings...Jarvis run a hepatitis and vampirism test! Why are your ears even bleeding?!" Stark fumed, stalking about the kitchen in a circle before locking eyes with an amused Sesshomaru. Sesshomaru managed an upward quirk of a
lip despite the pain.

His ears had finally burst. It irked Sesshomaru to show such a weakness, but he had assumed it would happen eventually.

"Son of Taisho! I should have known earlier your ears would be sensitive to this realm. I am sorry to have wounded you. I am most reckless." Thor went to Sesshomaru's side, Sesshomaru used his youki to heal his ears temporarily.

'I will need to find a means to use my hearing, without restricting it completely or this will simply be a regular hindrance.' Sesshomaru's ears lowered in thought.

"Your Peter Pan ears are sensitive to sound?" Stark, suddenly interested, went on his tip toes to examine them. Sesshomaru felt slightly self-conscious, Stark's hot breath tickled his neck and ears.

"Aye. Dog Demons possess highly tuned ears and noses. This realm is much louder than to what he is accustomed." Sesshomaru groaned inwardly. Thor was not conducive keeping weaknesses to himself.

"You're a Dog Demon? They have different types of Demons?!" Rogers piped up. Stark regarded him with interest.

"...you think Jaken and I are the same?" Sesshomaru's eyebrows rose.

"No. I guess I didn't think about it. The Demons I learned about all had horns." Rogers pondered and Stark crossed his arms in thought.

"I can help your ears." Stark smiled and Sesshomaru's eyes widened. Did he just offer his assistance to this Sesshomaru willingly? Sesshomaru blinked.

"I do not accept assistance, especially from humans." Sesshomaru responded, but he must have looked interested because Stark insisted.

"Pffft. A little late for that sleeping beauty, I have camera evidence of me carrying you down to your beloved Substorage room 3-b. Give me like, an hour tops and I'll knock your socks off." Stark winked and Sesshomaru decided, again, against his better judgment, to let the human do as he pleased.

"...do as you please. This Sesshomaru will indeed bathe." Sesshomaru turned from the group and went to the room Stark motioned to and eventually found an enormous wash basin. After a few tries he discovered that it was indeed an indoor hot spring.

How clever humans had become.

Sesshomaru stripped himself of his human clothes, hoping Lady Potts would return today as promised with his own clothes from the mysterious dry cleaners, and slipped into the warm water, submerging himself. The still water lapped at his toned, slender frame like a lake would.

Or a pool.

"Sesshomaruuuuuuu." Ripple. His name. His talons shot out reflexively.

Sesshomaru shot up out of the basin, panicked. Water sloshed everywhere and he found himself panting, his eyes wide and pupils' mere pinpricks. He looked down and saw it was just water. Just. Water.
He drained the basin.

It took him a bit longer to figure out how to work the rain attachment. He much preferred that to the tub. He even found potions which had lesser potent and nice scents, and washed himself thoroughly, including his long silver hair.

"Hey Sailor Moon did you drown?!" Sesshomaru heard a voice from the door. Stark? His ears still rang despite his healing them. Sesshomaru put on just his jeans, his shirt still wet from when the water lapped out of the basin he previously filled.

He, soaking wet silver hair and all, opened the door to both Stark and the Berserker. His long silver hair hung heavy, shining, and wet down his back and over his shoulders. He brushed aside his soaking bangs.

"This Sesshomaru is a strong swimmer." Sesshomaru responded, standing tall beside the door jamb. He noticed they were starting at him. These insufferable humans from this realm! Just what was so unusual about him? Were there truly no Demons or beings like him in this realm?

"Ahem...Well look who is indecently dressed now, Stripes." Stark still stared at him and Sesshomaru looked down at his magenta markings arcing down over his hip bones, flanking a trail of silver body hair going up to his navel. He had a matching pair that raced up over his ribs towards his chest. In a flare of blue youki, Sesshomaru's long hair swirled in the air and dried.

"Women across America would kill to dry their hair like that. Also I'd advise to not let Thor make you breakfast." The Berserker grinned at Stark, and Sesshomaru decided Berserker was most level-headed when not in battle.

"Agreed." Sesshomaru deadpanned. Stark struggled with something in his hands, almost dropping it. He did not seem the clumsy type. Odd.

"Here. I am a genius. I call them 'hear ain'ts'...because they're basically reverse engineered hearing aids. You put them on your ears and, uh, you can adjust them and yeah. They'll dampen the sounds you hear." Stark handed him two small devices and rubbed the back of his neck. Sesshomaru assessed them and decided they did not seem to be much of a threat.

He attached them on his ears carefully, waiting for a trap. However, he was most surprised.

Not even Sesshomaru couldn't stop the small, genuine smile that lit his face. Even though it was just the slightest upward curve of his lips, he knew Stark and the Berserker caught it. His ears wiggled in approval regardless. His gold eyes danced, these devices were perfect.

It had been a while since he received such aid without any obvious angle or ulterior motive. These humans in this realm were quite different indeed.

"I take it that they work since that's the only like, positive emotion I've seen from you. Also yeah, Dog Demon, ear wiggling, checks out." Stark all but stammered, pursing his lips together.

"...this Sesshomaru finds himself indebted to you. You may request of me something equivalent for compensation." Sesshomaru's voice sounded a touch soft. Stark's jaw dropped, not seeing that coming. Sesshomaru locked his gold eyes with Stark's dark brown ones, denoting he was quite serious.

The Berserker coughed.

"I lack a pertinent request at the moment." Stark threw Sesshomaru's words back at him.
Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles. The Berserker laughed.

"Turnabout is fair play Sesshomaru. Though I must ask why Stark has that particular liberty." Loki appeared in a flash of green. Stark and the Berserker went less on guard than Sesshomaru expected. That pleased him, over the past few days they had gotten used to Loki.

Sesshomaru said nothing and tugged on his red shirt over his head.

"Rin Tin Tin's ear drums over here burst when your brother, Point Break, tried to make breakfast." Stark motioned to the kitchen and Loki just looked confused.

"He blew up the microwave trying to heat up foil and a can of spaghetti sauce." Bruce explained and Loki rubbed his temple.

"...We aren't related by blood." Loki excused.

"Yeah, we know. Anyway, I made these 'hear ain'ts' so Lassie's ears aren't messing with him anymore. Not too much of a market in 'hear ain'ts' but what can I say I'm a philanthropist." Stark shrugged and all the sudden Sesshomaru felt a bit off kilter. So these devices were worthless and he made them anyway for him?

"Oh. Good work Stark." Loki commended, not needing to look to his friend for truth.

Sesshomaru noted Loki was beginning to look more like his old self, vanishing dark circles under his eyes, his skin was no longer milk white. Sesshomaru didn't necessarily envy Loki's more masculine looks, but he did wonder if it was easier. Loki, glamored or not, didn't stand out in this realm as much as he did.

Sesshomaru heard, even with the 'hear ain'ts', Rin from the kitchen and moved past Stark and Loki to locate her. He found her in the spotless kitchen, microwave device fixed, next to a freshly washed Rogers.

"Hey...who fixed the microwave?" The Berserker asked, Stark stood in awe of the cleanliness of the kitchen. Rogers pointed to Loki.

Stark and The Berserker looked to Loki in disbelief.

"If I had known it was Thor who had demolished it I wouldn't have bothered." Loki sighed.

"You two have some Shakespearean sized issues Reindeer Games." Stark said as Lady Potts wearing a professional outfit and a cheerful smile walked in with two shopping bags.

"Oh, hey there! I got Rin some new dresses, and you some new shirts, Happy is getting your dry cleaning at three. I figure Jack can just wear what Tony has forgotten he owns. You just have to uphold your end of the barter." Lady Potts reported and looked all business.

Sesshomaru looked back to Loki, his stare not giving anything away. Loki shifted.

It was over in 1.6 seconds.

He flicking his striped wrist, his toxin whip sprung out and ensnared Loki around the neck with a crack. With an almost feminine body twirl he slung Loki around, back-first through the plate glass window, shattering it. Sesshomaru chased his quarry out with a leap and with a quick kick, fired Loki straight down toward the street below.
Sesshomaru landed back into the room as if nothing had happened.

"Thank you. That was satisfying. Tony I'll bring by some accounts to sign later with the glass guy. I have a board meeting." Lady Potts left with a smile and a wave and Rogers, Stark, and the Berserker looked at Sesshomaru, jaws slack and eyes wide. Sesshomaru tossed his hair.

Loki teleported back into the room.

"What pray tell was that?!" Loki, windswept and with a few cuts, looked wild with outrage.

"A barter." Sesshomaru admitted, a corner of his mouth quirked up. Loki looked in between trying to attack Sesshomaru and joining in the joke.

"You know what, keep bartering. I love poetic justice. I don't know who is scarier you or Pepper." Stark leaned back, hands laced behind his head. Loki continued to give Sesshomaru a scorned look. Sesshomaru, eyes glimmering made eye contact with Stark at his approval.

"I don't think I understand your version of friendship." Rogers gestured to a now composed Loki. Sesshomaru should have shrugged, if he did such things.

"Lord Sesshomaru, when we go get more ice cream can I draw there?! I want to show Polly my new drawings!" Rin asked, dressed in a different sun dress, this one yellow, with her bone and bag of drawing implements. Jaken stood nearby, in his AC/DC hoodie with Tenseiga and Bakusaiga, them both thrumming in their tubes.

"Do as you wish Rin. We shall depart." Sesshomaru retrieved Tenseiga and Bakusaiga from Jaken.

"Hey, hate to break up another wonderful single parent PSA, but when Nat and Clint come back from waxing Fury's shoes you're up. No pressure Sailor Moon. Just if you fail to impress or convince us we will send your favorite God of Calamity up river, or to SHIELD, or to maybe Azkaban." Stark's words were playful, but his tone was cement heavy.

Everyone turned to Sesshomaru, Loki's clear eyes shined with an emotion Sesshomaru identified as trepidation.

Pause.

"You anticipate this Sesshomaru's opinion." Sesshomaru leveled a hard, reaching gaze at Loki, the Berserker, Rogers and finally Stark. "I have decided I will provide it to you. Come Rin, Jaken." Sesshomaru stated simply with a swish of hair he began to put on his jacket, boots and of course aviators. Jaken and Rin followed close behind.

"And people say I have a big ego." Stark muttered. Sesshomaru flipped down his aviators in response.

"...I think I finally understand how you," The Berserker pointed to a satisfied, if cautious, Loki. "And he stayed friends." And with that Loki's face blossomed with a wickedly amused smile.

"We're both burdened with glorious arrogance." Sesshomaru heard Loki state as he left for the elevator with Rin and Jaken, still Jack in tow. As they stepped outside his ears twitched up, appreciative of the device. He could hear perfectly. Stark's ingenuity and intelligence impressed him greatly, especially not knowing of his kind. And he created the device only for him.

Over the past few days Jaken had been successful in asking humans, which resulted in two more communication codes, where they could find certain places in Central Park, along with substitute
ice cream shops if Rin tired of the first one. The first one suggested a large vendor, which sold many flavors of ice cream, a mere half a kilometer from his current position, however it had many screaming human children inside.

Absolutely not.

The human, Jason Sisson, who recommended the first shop they went to, remained the one they decided to regularly frequent. Perhaps when he acquired his own communication device he would inquire about this modelling, he was most helpful thus far.

Sesshomaru continued to go back to the ice cream shop to inform Polly on his opinions of the musical artists. He appreciated Polly's affection for Rin as well as her ability to communicate with her. Polly indicated her parents had travelled from where his lands are currently, to this metropolis. They both shared a similar distaste for their current surroundings.

"Lord Sesshomaru, Rin thinks Uncle Loki didn't like the mint chocolate chip! We will have to find him another flavor. And I promised Stark I would get him chocolate since he helped you. Chocolate is his favorite, but it is not Rin's. I think I will try strawberry today!" Rin skipped, swinging her bone, causing certain humans to regard her strangely.

Rin decided they would bring back ice cream for the rest since today Barton and Romanoff would be back from their excursion.

"Rin, Lord Sesshomaru cares not which human enjoys which ice cream flavor!" Jaken, still Jack replied and Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow at him.

"You dare speak for what I enjoy Jaken?" Sesshomaru's voice, though placid, held slight warning.

"No! Never Lord Sesshomaru, I just merely want to state you need not concern yourself over such things!" Jaken jumped and Sesshomaru smirked as he opened the door to the shop, the bell above the door announcing their entry. Being a cool time in the year, and with similar establishments surrounding them, they found themselves being only one of three parties in the store.

"Welcome to Happy Dragon Ice cream shop, our daily special flavor i-oh it's you again Mr. Mysterious, How's kicks?" Polly spun around, due to her not facing the door upon their arrival.

Polly did not appear as most humans in this realm did, and in fact appeared more like a Demon. She had many markings and intricate designs across her neck, legs, and arms. She called them tattoos and she was not born with them, but instead had someone mark her with them. Her hair was stained purple, and stood in a crest above her head not unlike some Bird Demons he once knew. She also wore many metal rings on her eye brows, ears and lips, which, to his surprise, were not a mark of a warrior.

She was short, perhaps only coming to his upper arm, and much more slender than many of the plump humans he saw walking about the metropolis. Today she wore dark red lip paint and grey powder on her eyes.

"Hello Polly! Rin is going to practice with Jaken, who is now Jack in the store! I am also going to draw you a picture! I am going to draw you Ah-Un, he is a two headed dragon, and the others today!" Rin scampered up to the counter and jumped up and down. Sesshomaru allowed his gaze to soften.

"Ah, sounds rad Rin, I can't wait to see your Dragon, it sucks he isn't here with you, but to be honest, I don't think New York could handle a Dragon right now, much less one with two heads."
Polly responded in the language Rin understood and she nodded.

Rin placed her bag of drawing implements at a nearby table, away from the furthest customers in the store. Rin drew her bone and descended upon Jaken with it, who used Tenseiga's tube to block. His staff of two heads attracted undue attention the last time they were in the shop.

"So Mr. Mysterious, let me guess, your favorite was Michael Jackson, right?" Polly leaned against the counter as Sesshomaru approached it, continuing to talk in the language of his lands.

"This Sesshomaru ranked the following musical artists as such: Nirvana, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, and furthest down the Crow band." He reported, showing her the paper he had written. He was practicing writing the script of this realm, it came to him easier than expected.

"Oh wow. Didn't peg you for a grunge fan, but I can respect that. I'll suggest some similar bands, and some that I feel like you'd like as well. You also look like you're in a much better mood, Cookie dough and Mint Chocolate Chip doing alright?" Polly asked, taking another piece of paper from behind her cash box and began to scribble.

"They live. The one who received the Mint Chocolate Chip desires another flavor. Perhaps another green one. He did not eat it, however at the time he had been shot with many arrows." Sesshomaru reported and Polly looked up in slight horror.

"Damn, that's a tough beat; I got some lime sherbet. Tell Mint Chocolate Chip he needs chiller friends, or to stay out of cars. Crossbows are like, the second most used weapon in road rage next to golf clubs. Trust me on that one. One piercer at the tattoo shop I apprentice at got shot at once by some psycho with one when he was driving through Jersey." Polly informed, she was a wealth of information, though he doubted Barton fired haphazardly at vehicles.

"I do not like these vehicles. I have ridden in one, they are abhorrent and smell of human waste." Sesshomaru wrinkled his nose. Polly laughed, her voice a smoky alto.

"Oh, been in a taxi have you? Get your friends Cookie Dough and Mint Chocolate Chip to try Uber, it's a lot better, but I agree, it's why I bike everywhere. Once I become a licensed Tattoo Artist and save up I'll be out of here, go somewhere smaller, maybe Austin." Polly watched Rin land a hit on Jaken, the other customers left the store in a hurry.

"You're so lucky you're in New York where a Japanese girl beating another kid with a bone is something that happens on the reg. Why are you here in New York anyway? You totally seem more of a West Coast kind of guy. Like Malibu or the O.C." Polly asked, looking up to him, fidgeting with one of her many rings.

"The one you refer to as Mint Chocolate Chip brought me here to aid him in a quest. I know not for how long I will reside here, but I pray too it will not be too long. I rather not deal with these humans for too much longer." Sesshomaru admitted carelessly, eyes widening slightly when he realized his mistake in referring to the people of this realm as humans. He stiffened visibly, muscles flexing under his shirt.

"Mr. Mysterious, it's ok. While most people who live here might think you just have some crazy bod mods, I can tell straight up you aren't human. Those markings on your face are way too precise to be from a tattoo gun, and I know your eyes aren't contacts. Your ears too? No way. You're also like, just, like, really pointy and pretty. Listen, whatever you are, I don't care. We had aliens come out of the sky like, three years ago so we get it. We aren't alone, yadda yadda. I won't tell anyone your dirty little secret, not even my girlfriend." Polly admitted, and Sesshomaru relaxed, and, yet again today, against his better judgment, he decided to indulge a human curiosity.
"This Sesshomaru is no alien. This Sesshomaru is a Demon Lord." Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and taking off his aviators. He showed his talons and locked eyes with hers, testing her.

"Sesshomaru! You have a Japanese name? Killing perfection? Bad ass. And Demon Lord? Hoowee, we totally got the Demon thing wrong, you don't even have horns." Polly smiled wide, straightening up. Sesshomaru's eyes widened slightly, maybe she knew about his kind.

"Have you heard of any other Demons in this region? One may be a Bear Demon named Smokey." He asked and she cackled in laughter, he brought his hand into a fist. She dared mock him?

"Oh wow, sorry, not laughing at you Mr. Mysterious. Smokey the Bear is a made up thing to tell people not to start forest fires. And as for Demons, humans think they're made up. We've never known them to actually exist, outside of religious fanatics or crazy people. You're the first Demon I know of to, well, be real. Sorry. You're welcome to stay here as long as you want, my Mom and Dad aren't working in the shop today so you guys can have the run of it." Polly finished and Sesshomaru refused to let show the shock on his face. So, even a human whose family came from his Lands had encountered no Demons.

'His people, they were not just eradicated in this portion of this time, but apparently across this realm.' Sesshomaru felt his jaw slacken a bit, he nodded in appreciation at Polly's invitation and turned to help Rin with her form and technique.

"Hey, sorry to break it to you like that. I mean who knows, maybe Demons exist somewhere else. Ya know? I gotta break down the freezer and clean it. Watch the store and make sure no one robs it will ya?" Polly gave him a peace sign and disappeared into the walk in freezer. Sesshomaru would guard the ice cream store, if for any reason Polly had become an invaluable source of knowledge outside Storm God's friends.

"Lord Sesshomaru! May Rin draw us with our new human friends?! I'll disguise Mint Chocolate chip, I promise!" Sesshomaru nodded in agreement of her artwork, but not of her assessment of them as 'friends'.

"Oh yeah Rin, draw them, I gotta see what kind of delinquents a Demon Lord rolls with!" He heard Polly call from the freezer and Sesshomaru then debated how valuable she was.

It was then that human Jason Sisson walked into the ice cream shop. Of the Four Lands…

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I appreciate any and all feedback. thank you again for your continued support!

-TL
Tony knew he was in trouble. Would he ever admit it? No. He would it take it to his grave, just like most of the unsavory memories of that one trip to Singapore, and a party in Ibiza he went to once involving a Brazilian escort, a motorcycle and a handful of women dressed as the Spice Girls.

The trouble? He may, may, be a bit more than just intrigued by the Demon Lord.

And it wasn't just about the shocking, but not wholly unwelcome steamy dream he had about him last night. Which, was pretty confusing since usually when he usually had dreams, they weren't pleasant. This one, which he was jolted out of by the explosion of his microwave, left him flagpole stiff, and begging for a release he didn't have time for.

Tony rarely felt self-conscious, especially in his own house, but damn if that Demon Lord didn't bring it out of him this morning in the kitchen. He only bolted out of his bed like a greyhound after a rabbit, because he assumed the worst and that someone may have broken his bottle of good scotch, or Loki self-destructed.

'This is what worrying gets people, it's why I let Pepper do it for me. How dare he tell me how I'm dressed in my own house is indecent! And what was I thinking with the neck blood thing?! That's such a creeper thing to do. Who does that? I mean aside from something out of a terrible Anne Rice novel? He is tearing my life apart.' Tony's thoughts ran a mile a minute, taking a seat next to Steve, thinking about what he wanted to eat for breakfast.

Tony had observed Sesshomaru the past few days, the guy was unflappable, except when he melted the forks at the steak restaurant. He wasn't entirely sure what his relationship was exactly with Loki, but he had a feeling they weren't getting hot and heavy in substorage room 3-b. Tony, however, definitely wasn't about to ask them though.

His haughty, better-than-thou attitude combined with his expressionless, calm demeanor completely grated Tony's nerves. However, it at the same time screamed challenge. He had to shake it.

Nothing affected him and he seemed completely uninterested anything to do with the modern era except Central Park and an Ice Cream shop he kept taking Rin to. All this new technology, science, advancements, and constructs and he didn't seem curious in the least. He just drifted through it like it was all beneath him.

Rin following Sesshomaru around like a puppy, Dog Demon reference there, also baffled him. Tony had no idea why they were together, they were like night and day. Jaken followed him around like a groupie, and again, why the stone-cold Sailor Moon tolerated him was, again another mystery.

Tony liked mysteries though, this one, however, definitely more than intrigued him, and that was a problem. This one apparently aroused him.
Sesshomaru, Toady and Little Miss Sunshine had just left, however not before Loki glamored Jaken to the same Japanese boy. Toady threw a tantrum and Sailor Moon smacked him on the head with Rin's bone. Tony, however, was mildly surprised Rin was taking to New York so well considering she looked like she was in tears when they first arrived. Then again, now she had her 'weapon'.

Oh yeah, let's take a deer femur to the ice cream shop. Great parenting Sailor Moon, real low profile. Not that the Demon Lord himself was that low profile, he attracted attention like a lighthouse, which ironically seems to be the last thing that arrogant guy wants.

'And God. I acted like such an uncoordinated jackass when I saw him in the bathroom. The plan was to catch Sailor Moon off guard with my science lab partner in crime and to prove to him he was not above science. Not for him to come out shirtless, showing stripes on places that I didn't even dream of.' Tony thought back to his dream and a dart of heat zig zagged down from his navel.

It was unfair.

'Unfair for him, with his wet merman silver hair, and his stupid six-pack to look so casual and stoic. Like, 'hey world it's time you impressed me!' I felt like I was in high school fumbling with a corsage for prom.' Tony grumbled to himself, looking to see Loki standing around looking awkward as hell.

He could feel Bruce's eyes on him, as if reading his impure thoughts.

"Greetings! I have bathed! Let us properly brea-Brother how grand for you to have joined us!" Thor strode into the room and Tony immediately turned around.

This should be good.

"You know... Why don't I make us some eggs..." Bruce busied himself in the kitchen. Tony truthfully worried about how the Green Rage Monster was going to fare around Bambi doing...well anything other than standing perfectly still without Sailor Moon around.

Could Thor handle Loki in a fight? Yeah, straight up.

Thor was basically every army's dream warrior. Basically, if you were an alien god race, you wanted him on your side. He could definitely beat Loki in a fight, especially with him still recovering from 'Allfather' knows what conditions back in Azkaban.

Could Loki outsmart Thor? Yeah, he already has.

'The outsmarting thing was the worrying part, not that Loki is smarter than a genius like me, but the sneaky crafty stuff is so much work. The effort is really a pain in my ass, which is why if Sailor Moon is legit, will save me a lot of sleepless nights. He's already proven that he can only tolerate so much of Loki's crap.' Tony scratched the back of his neck.

Sleepless nights...heh.

"Yes Thor, here I am." Loki grandly gestured and Tony noticed he was back to wearing his black leather pants and green shirt. Leather pants...who is this guy? Some sorority girl studying abroad for the first time?

Tony had not yet begun to even tackle the issue that was Loki. All evidence pointed that he trusted Loki in what he said, but that the same time, he totally didn't. Loki struck Tony as one of those people who would bend, manipulate, basically fuck with anyone to achieve his goals.
Loki, so far, seemed like the kind of guy to give you razor wire for dental floss if it would make sure he achieved his goal. However, his goal of saving Earth was one Tony could get behind. He had, however, stopped thinking Loki would probably attack him. He just became this wildcard in a stacked deck of cards of misfits that was his tower. Well, all misfits except for himself of course.

"You know I think there is probably a baseball game on." Steve abandoned Tony for the sofa, fumbling awkwardly for the remote. Traitor. His friends abandoned him to the Shakespearian family drama that was Reindeer Games and Point Break.

Why was his life so weird now?

"It is good to see you so well Brother, that is, I am glad you are reunited with your friend, Son of Taisho, despite of circumstances." Thor just hit a foul ball, Tony noted, rubbing his beard.

"We are not brothers, quite literally. And oh yes recovering quite well after Asgard handling me like a treasonous, genocidal snake and my old friend launching me out a window." Loki brooded, but if Tony was any judge of character he could tell Loki was on edge, probably because we told him he wasn't leaving Stark Tower again until we heard strategy from Sailor Moon.

He remembered when Cap said that after Sailor Moon left Loki bristled in agitation, but submitted. Tony got it, he didn't like being told what to do either.

If Tony was a betting man, and he was, he bet that Sesshomaru was keeping closer tabs than others would think on his War Criminal BFF with his proximity barrier thing while out being dad of the year.

"Brother you committed great crimes against Midgard, me, and Asgard. I do not know what possessed you so, for you are not the person I remember." Thor confessed, face flushing in exasperation. Loki rolled his eyes.

"Oh yes. I am quite assuredly not who I used to be." Loki bit cryptically, eyes flashing. Tony reared back a bit, unsure what to do with that reaction. Loki definitely fit the description as 'unbalanced'

"...and it's the top of the 5th inning, bases loaded and Yankees Stadium electric with energy as Harper approaches-" Steve found the game, albeit at full volume. Tony and Bruce welcomed the interruption.

"Hey Tony, Steve how do you want your eggs? And uh Thor, Loki um do you want any?" Mom, Tony meant Bruce, called out

"Scrambled!" Tony answered

"Scrambled is fine." Steve responded, looking far too interested in the baseball game.

"It would be an honor to eat your cooking Banner! Eggs scrambled it is!" Thor rebounded.

"...I am fine...thank you." Loki's electric green eyes darted suspiciously. Ok, Reindeer Games, Bruce isn't going to poison you, damn what is with those two and thinking their food is poisoned? First Sailor Moon on the Quinjet, now Loki and the eggs. Their paranoia is a bit extreme, besides it'd totally be Natasha to poison him, not Bruce.

'I wonder what eggs Sailor Moon would eat. Well if he ate human food. Or 'fare' as his pompous ass calls it. He probably has never even eaten eggs. But that smile. That illegal fucking smile that I caused when I gave him those hear ain'ts. Hear ain'ts, what was I even thinking with that name? It's not even clever, it's a cheap pun. Hot damn, the way his scary pretty eyes looked into me, the way
his lips curled and his ears! They actually moved!' Tony's thoughts drifted.

Tony had to get laid, or find some good porn, with some long haired blondes in it or something, but not the Thor version of long haired blond. Definitely with tribal tattoos. Nineties grunge porn.

Is 'nineties-grunge porn with silver haired gold eyed men striped in tribal tattoos and claws' even searchable on redtube? Well if it isn't...

'No. No. No. No. No. Bad Tony. I know you love bad ideas, and bucking the rules but seducing a Demon Lord is out of the question. Especially one who has a bizarrely close bromance with public enemy number one. Even for a hit and quit it.' Tony jolted in surprise when a plate of eggs slid in front of him.

"I thought I smelled something burning, I knew it wasn't my eggs." Bruce grinned. Bastard.

They must have all been looking for a scapegoat for attention. Well, it is what Tony Stark does best.

"Yeah, I was thinking what proof do we have that our dear Demon Lord is that great of a strategist? Like, we only know are that he studied it. Do we have like a report card, SAT score, community college ID? If we are to ensure that the 'Sesshoki' power couple isn't going to lie and kill us all-"

"Sesshoki?! By the nines….and Sesshomaru doesn't lie. You can accuse me of a great many things, but what Sesshomaru says will come to pass." Loki seethed from sitting on the floor, apparently unwilling to sit in a chair. What is with them and furnishings?!

"Yeah. Liesmith? You could be lying about him remember?" Tony rolled his eyes, shoveling a forkful of eggs into his mouth. Loki darkened on the floor.

"And another run batted in by the Washington Nationals!" Steve deflated, clearly a Yankees fan.

"...Son of Taisho is indeed a brilliant general. He defended his lands during a time of great duress," Thor said instantly, inhaling his eggs. That piqued Tony's interest. Tony had noticed over the past few days that Sailor Moon and Point Break weren't exactly friends. Well, Thor probably thought of Sailor Moon as one, Tony severely doubted that the feeling was mutual since Sesshomaru avoided him.

Well, avoided everyone except Tony. He had always been on Tony's periphery, they had baited each other a few times into more question games. At one point Tony had returned to see Jaken wearing another of Tony's Black Sabbath hoodies. When he fought Jaken over it, by principle, it was his tower afterall, Sesshomaru stated, verbatim "It suits Jaken better." Seriously?! He was saying his own hoodie looked better on Toady. That stuck up bastard.

"Oh, so he has actual experience defending against an attack?" Bruce snapped Tony out of his thoughts. Bruce suddenly seemed interested, as he washed the frying pan.

Thor looked to Loki, and Loki gestured wildly with hands, green fairy lights appeared and morphed into a full color image of a guy who looked of like their near and dear Demon Lord.

Only he had his hair up, and bangs weren't as neat. His skin was darker and overall face appeared more rough and masculine. His face tattoos were the wrong color and also too thick and jagged and only one on them each cheek. No moon either, and his eyes were far more expressive under dark eyebrows. His chin also didn't have that tantalizing point to it.

Well, now that he thought about it, the only things similar to him were his hair and eye color.
Thor looked to Loki, deferring to him to talk, and Loki sighed heavily.

"They won't believe a thing I say!" Loki hung his head dramatically, dark long hair falling around him. He could spice up any reality TV show with his actions. Maybe 'Bad Girls Club'

"...ah...yes. This was Inu no Taisho, Sesshomaru's father, a great Lord and General." Thor gestured, Tony could see some resemblance, but it was if Sesshomaru was a much more refined, elegant version. If they were weapons, Sesshomaru would be the B-2 bomber, all sharp and stealth, and his father would be the f-18, all rugged and flashy. Tony knew weapons after all.

"Forgive me friends, this is an old tale, one known better to my brother than I, but I shall do my best to give it it's due accuracy." Thor cleared his throat of eggs.

"You see friends, Lord Inu no Taisho and my father were friends for centuries. They met when the he wished to expand the education of his generals, advisors, and son. Asgard had relations at the time with Demons, just not with humans. My father, along with others from the other nine realms decided to conduct tournaments and tutoring opportunities for their children on Midgard. Inu no Taisho, Lord of the West, was a famous General and a fearsome fighter." Thor explained and Loki moved his fingers as if weaving something into Odin and Inu no Taisho together.

"Inu no Taisho, eventually began a dalliance with a human noble named…Izayoi? Yes. Izayoi. The Western Lands were entangled in a time of war and strife, suffering attacks from both the Northern and Eastern lands." Thor began, and even Steve looked interested, probably because his Yankees sucked this season.

"However, Inu no Taisho, with his great prowess and ferocity, was able to rebuff these attacks. These times are when we knew Son of Taisho. War and conflict is all Son of Taisho knew growing up in the Western Lands. His father's dalliance resulted in Izayoi being with child." Tony decided to study Loki during this, but all he did was maintain the hologram, and look at the ground.

"This coupling was to many people's disappointment. Dog Demons are known to be quite loyal and Half-Demons were not tolerated but great Inu no Taisho cared not!" Tony heard Loki scoff slightly, the image altering to a great dragon.

"Lord Inu no Taisho, in order to save his son to be Inuyasha, and Izayoi, left his castle to save them from a great dragon, whose name escapes me." Thor admitted, but was a pretty good story teller in his own right. Tony thought he had to get Sailor Moon to tell another one about Loki soon.

"Ryokuutsei." Loki supplied, voice dim. Tony could tell he wasn't having a whole lot of fun talking about Sailor Moon's past.

"The knight saves the maiden from the dragon, we've heard this one before." Steve turned off the massacre of a baseball game.

"...not quite. During their mighty battle, Sesshomaru, Son of Taisho was named Lord Regent until Inu no Taisho's return. Their enemies seized this opportunity of supposed weakness and allied to invade the Western Lands while their Lord was off gallivanting." Thor's voice darkened as he finished his eggs and Tony didn't feel hungry anymore.

"Many deemed Sesshomaru not ready to lead, despite his acclaim and intelligence. Allfather stated to us his father tested his son with this scenario to see if he was fit to be Lord. When the Northern and Eastern armies conducted a pincer attack, not only did many of his forces defect, surrender or run, but all of Son of Taisho's family: Uncles, Aunts, Cousins and friends challenged him for his title of Lord Regent, a right they did not have." At this point, the image Loki conjured had morphed
into a burning horizon, spears, blood, swords and corpses everywhere.

"Fun for the whole family." Tony heard himself say. Christ, talk about family drama, definitely rivals Point Break and Reindeer Games.

"Sesshomaru was forced to slay anyone who challenged his rule, his own kin and friends. He then had to defend the Western Lands against near impossible odds, the enemy armies coupled outnumbering the lingering forces three to one." Thor looked uncomfortable, he kept looking to Loki who didn't look back.

"Wait, he had to kill his own family? And conduct a defense of his homeland at the same time?" Steve questioned, finally touching his eggs.

"Aye, I once met some of those relatives and friends, fine Demons, however the lust of power tainted their minds and poisoned their hearts." Thor looked to Loki, who just, again changed the illusion to a miserable, gut strewn battlefield with a deft movement of fingers.

"Talk about family feud." Bruce leaned back against the counter, and Tony knew it was his queue to say something witty but couldn't think of anything.

"Against all odds, Sesshomaru defended his stronghold against the invading forces. Allfather states he utilized spies to cut off their supply routes, and various fire attacks to isolate the vanguard from the cavalry. He even managed to flood a whole section of the battlefield, behind the fire attacks, rendering their siege towers and catapults useless in mud or rotting. He even poisoned the water supply of their archers by his own hand. Lastly, he challenged the Lord of the Eastern Lands, a great Tiger Demon...named..." Thor trailed, eyes going off and up to the left.

"Lord Huto." Loki helped, smirking slightly.

"Aye, and decapitated him in front of his own army." Thor smiled, flicking his fork across his throat.

Loki finally conjured an image of a slightly younger Sesshomaru, eyes like a dead flame, covered in gaping lacerations. His left ear hung limply on his head, nearly torn off, fresh blood covering the left side of his face and neck. His mouth a straight line of ice. In his right hand he held a head by the hair, roughly hacked off at the neck, and he held it up high. With fire and smoke in the background he looked like a Demon the Bible described, sans horns and wicked smile.

"He even put the head in one of his own catapults and launched it back at their retreating forces." Loki laughed, and Tony couldn't tell if thinking that move was badass now got him a membership at 'Sociopaths 'R Us'.

"And this guy is living in my basement. I'll have to hide my catapults." Tony admitted lamely, still trying to rectify the wet and smiling silver haired man in his bathroom earlier today, with this gruesome version.

'But hey, didn't I do the same before Afghanistan, just with more explosions and less claws? Is what we did really that dissimilar? I just didn't personally have the blood on me, well, until I became Iron Man' Tony self-reflected, not a talent of his.

"The Western Lands lost much of their bordering lands, but managed to save a sizable portion of the interior. Many of his people were slain, injured, sullied, or lost everything in the attempted invasion. Sesshomaru obtained a reputation as a cunning, fearsome and ruthless leader in fending off the intruders, his family, and defected troops. He inspired great loyalty and notoriety." Thor
straightened a bit, as if in reverence.

"Oh yes, but at what cost?" Loki finally spoke up, and conjured a great skeleton.

"Inu no Taisho was slain in the battle against the great dragon, but managed to save Inuyasha, the unborn half demon, and his mother." Thor grimaced. Tony sucked in a gulp of air, he knew how that felt, to some extent.

"Wait so, what happened next?" Steve ate more of his eggs, curiosity piqued.

"Son of Taisho became Lord of the Western Lands. Son of Taisho then began to reclaim the power at the height of his father's reign. His brother remained a mystery to me, I never met him. I heard he may have been pinned to a tree or sealed away at some point." Thor took a big gulp of water.

"Half-brother. And that is true." Loki automatically corrected. Steve's eyes lit up.

"That was him? He told me about him, said he was there for like fifty years before some other priestess released him or something. He made it sound like it was just acquaintance of his." Steve imputed and Loki's eyebrows furrowed, clearly news to him. Tony frowned, so Sailor Moon opened up to Steve, huh? Why Steve? What made Bedclothes so special?

"Did he have a mother?" Tony surprised himself by asking that question. He didn't even know he wanted to ask it.

Thor looked to Loki, apparently he had no idea.

"...She lived, but we never met her and Sesshomaru did not mention her much. I suspect her existence in Sesshomaru's life was quite distant, if you are to believe my opinion." Loki dismissed his illusions and remained on the floor, looking pale.

Tony couldn't help but draw some fierce parallels from Sesshomaru's upbringing and his own. Critical, testing father who had his attentions elsewhere, distant, mostly absent mother. Sesshomaru, despite being nobility, certainly didn't have a cake walk of a time. Their childhoods, or upbringings really, actually resonated with Tony more than he wanted to admit.

"So... basically, you're saying that Sesshomaru may be one of our best chances at fending off an alien invasion, if we choose to believe you." Bruce looked weary but focused.

"Aye. He is a great general and has unbound persistence. When we saw him weeks after the last battle, he was still covered in scars and wounds he did not have a chance to heal from fighting on the front lines so vigorously." Thor explained.

Tony, hearing all of this, still wasn't convinced. Ok so Sailor Moon had experience thwarting invasions that happened like five centuries ago. It wasn't exactly the Fuedal Era of Japan anymore.

They had heavier firepower for one, helicarriers, AGM-69 SRAM cruise missiles, you name it. And from Tony had seen so far, Sesshomaru didn't seem to do much except strangle people with his whip, make a curiously strong toxin, and stand half naked in shower doors looking wet and bored. Oh, and the scrying thing, couldn't forget about that.

In fact, looking over to Point Break, aside from speed he had no idea how he managed to go close to even with Thor in melee battles. Thor seemed a lot stronger and he could strike people down with lightning. It didn't make sense that Sailor Moon stood a chance, unless his youki or something did more than he studied it could.
That was another thing that made Tony restless, is that he didn't know what Sesshomaru could do. He was used to having weapons of potential mass destruction in his tower, however, usually he knew of their exact capabilities.

"Sorry if I am going to burst everyone's little bubble but he defended an attack from a bunch of spear wielding cat people. How is this relevant now? We have stronger weapons, vehicles faster than a horse, and oh yeah space ships and portals to space." Tony leaned back in his chair, looking to Loki for a challenge. He indeed looked a bit annoyed, but much to Tony's dismay he didn't appear to take what Tony said seriously since he just hit the back of his head against the wall, sighing up to the ceiling.

"Yeah, battle strategy has changed a lot since I was a soldier as well and that was only seventy years ago." Steve added, agreeing to Tony's point and swaying the room's attitude towards skepticism.

"The principles of the strategy are still quite sound. Besides, Sesshomaru is studying this realm and its technological achievements. Also, you should not underestimate the power of Demons, especially a Demon like Sesshomaru possess. You haven't seen what he is truly capable of and honestly, probably neither have I." Loki stood, Tony looked to Thor for confirmation. He hadn't known Sailor Moon had been studying, and what was he studying? He could or should have just asked him!

First he goes and opens up to Steve, now he is reading 'the 21st century for dummies.' Without telling him.

"Demons are quite strong Man of Iron; I have fought many Demons and their powers can rival Midgard's weaponry. Inu no Taisho himself wielded a sword named Sounga, the Sword of Hell. Its power could level mountains, and call upon demons from their underworld. The only weapons I have seen that rival it in power is Mjolnir, Gungnir, and perhaps Son of Taisho's new sword, Bakusaiga. I know not much of his new sword, but its energy is considerable." Thor rubbed his chin.

"So, you're saying that, well, by transitive property, that Backstreet Boy is as strong as Mjolnir?" Well, Tony, scratched his beard, that was something. Maybe it too had powers outside creating scry-nados and being a general pain in the ass. Maybe the reason why Sailor Moon hadn't used it wasn't just to be mysterious but also to be cautious.

"In different ways. They are very different weapons. However, I sense something very strange about Son of Taisho's swords. It is as if they are somewhat sentient." Thor expounded and Tony just rubbed his hand down his face. He, like Clint, had had enough of talking about the swords as if they could possibly be alive. Loki turned his face up to his brother, as if impressed.

"Those swords, are no ordinary weapons. Even I know not what Bakusaiga is capable of, and I suspect that Tenseiga has yet to reveal his full power as well. You speak of your weapons here in Midgard and your technological advancements, I would state you not underestimate his weapons or my own gifts." Loki spoke up, flaring his green magic into the shape of a missile, then a sword.

"Yeah, I never said I'd underestimate what he is capable of. I've studied his youki, he can heal himself and apparently cause damage faster than Steve can say the Yankees are terrible!" Tony found himself protesting.

"I'd never say that. They're just having a rebuilding year." Steve huffed good naturedly.

"When we studied together, his strategies were second only to mine. He was always far too reckless
with his own self in battle." Loki drew runes in magic on the floor.

"Well, yeah, sounds like he had a lot to prove trying to get out of big daddy's shadow when he basically abandoned his job and people for his side piece and a bun in the oven. His father left him a mess to clean up and he had to do it alone since his mom lit out and everyone else tried to kill him." Tony white knighted Sesshomaru and Steve and Banner looked to him, a little surprised.

"What? I think I know a little about trying to live up to daddy's indomitable legacy and having your closest family betray you when shit hits the fan." Tony reached under where he was seated and got out a hidden fifth of vodka. Screwdrivers it was.

"I agree with your assessment of his motivations Stark, however I still do not approve of his approach to his own station in battle." Loki, sounded angry, as if it was a recurring fight between himself and Sesshomaru. Tony got up and mixed his drink.

"Well, yeah, you're friends. You don't want to see him get hurt." Steve, ever the ray of sunshine, all the sudden made Loki straighten and he looked as serious as a heart attack.

He stood up suddenly and went to Thor, hands balled at his sides. His knuckles white and Tony thought he may attack of he wasn't trembling slightly.

"If you remain unconvinced of my claims, even with Sesshomaru's examination, do as you wish with me. I can't say it will be effective because nothing will stop me, save death, from going after the Other and the Mad Titan alone." Loki swallowed, and he could tell Thor as about to protest.

"Be that as it may, if there is any ardor, any respect of me still in you Thor you will convince Odin to return him. You will not allow my designs to bring harm to him or his. You will not allow SHIELD…" Loki looked to Banner, Stark and Rogers "…to take him or his." Loki's commanding voice echoed and took a deep breath and held his brother's gaze intently.

Oh hell no, SHIELD doesn't just to get to take people. They don't get to have whatever they want. Tony took a deep, biting, sip of his drink.

"Of course brother. You have my vow that he will not suffer any repercussions, but you make it sound going after this Titan and the Other is..." Thor trailed off

"Something akin to suicide, yes. I know the odds, I'm a seasoned strategist, it's one reason why I haven't already." Loki set his jaw and Thor looked like he may have a breakdown. Tony couldn't handle another breakdown, not so quickly after scrybaby.

"You're also implying SHIELD will try use us to apprehend someone who hasn't committed any crime! Sesshomaru hasn't done anything wrong, he isn't even here by choice." Steve raised his idealism meter to 'super patriot'.

"They um, did try to nuke New York. And you heard Fury and saw how excited he was with someone he thought was Loki on Earth. I wouldn't put it past him if he found out about the 'Sesshoki' bromance They'd try something." Tony leaned back and looked Loki straight in his intense green eyes.

He really meant it. Whatever the fuck was going on, Loki didn't want anything to happen to him. He could respect that. What's power if you can't use it to protect people you care about?

"I agree with Tony. SHIELD can't be trusted fully. They deceived us about Agent Coulson. They constantly track my movements and see me as a liability. I don't know how it would get out that you two are friends." Stark coughed "Barton" and Banner glared back. "But, I won't let SHIELD
get their hands on what they think is another monster." Bruce agreed and Loki took almost a full step back, like he lost his balance.

Tony barely caught the whispered thank you come from the sorcerer.

"Yeah. There's no fun in that. I'm pretty sure Pepper would fire sale Stark Industries if I made Rin cry, much less give her father over to the overlords on SHIELD's council because of their pant-on-head crazy power trip. Besides Sailor Moon is a riot when he isn't teaming up with Point Break and blowing up my kitchen." Tony silently added to himself, 'and isn't bad to look at either.'

"Well, like I said before, I cannot allow SHIELD to apprehend anyone who hasn't done anything wrong, even if he does call me bedclothes." Steve amended his previous statement.

"Bedclothes? Oh your uniform...yes I can see it." Loki's face lit up devilishly and Steve simmered.

"What do you think we are up against brother?" Thor changed the subject and Loki sighed again, gesturing to Tony, Steve and Bruce as if to say again, they wouldn't believe him. Tony sighed, might as well hear what he has to say. Tony was smart enough, hopefully, to figure out if Loki was either fearmongering them or understating the threat.

"Just talk, we all know you like to." Tony threw his hands in the air which caused Loki to flash an almost genuine smile.

"The secondary fleet consists of six ships, two Cruisers, one Destroyer, two Battleships, and The Mad Titan's own Flagship. The Mad Titan, humorously enough, took a shine to Midgardian Greek mythology. The Aethon and The Nycteus, a nod to Hades' horses, are the cruisers and the fleet's swiftest." Loki conjured the image of the Cruisers, both black, with a purple Axe insignia across the tail's vertical stabilizer.

The cruisers looked oddly like Virginia class attack submarines, only sharper with slight wings off the sides.

"The Worldslayer, their Destroyer, is their main weapon. The Mad Titan usually uses this destroyer in worlds he plans on conquering, not obliterating." Loki's image of the Cruisers now included the Destroyer.

The destroyer, Tony could understand why it looked like it was their main weapon. It was if someone stretched a sea urchin, flattened it, and bent it into a chevron shape. It had a large white eye on its underside and definitely could pack a punch. If Sailor Moon's swords were sentient, this thing was a fucking living monster, like those whale monsters that showed up three years ago.

"I have…rather intimate knowledge of the Other's Battleship, The Relentless. It is most likely quite similar to its' sister ship The Voracious. Though I know not who commands The Voracious." Loki conjured image of the battleships, and Tony leaned back, so the Other, commanded one of the battleships.

The battleships that Loki showed them honestly didn't look like much. They looked like discs, like what everyone thought UFO's looked like back in the fifties. They were hollow in the middle, yet Loki could tell that Stark didn't look impressed and the image morphed to show the disc was actually a series of rings, that turned out into an easily understood shape of an atom. The hollow space in between them glowed ultra-violet.
"The battleships, together, have the capability of turning Midgard to gravel." Loki educated, the ultraviolet core of the battleships glowed and the rings turned, also glowing purple. Obviously these ships had some sort of laser ray, or a rave. Probably both, Natasha did call Loki Glow Stick.

"So what about the flagship, brother?" Thor inquired, poking one of the magicked images, causing The Aethon to distort. Loki paused in his magicked illustrations to look Thor, then Tony, then Bruce straight in the eye.

"The Umbra." Loki's voice sounded breathy and if Tony were to guess, a hair scared.

"The Mad Titan's flagship, is what truly concerns me." Loki's fingers weaved through the air and what appeared wasn't veryconcerting.

Loki revealed a funnel shaped ship, all black and flexing, as if it was constructed in segments. Inside the funnel were things that Tony could only describe as teeth, rows and rows not unlike a shark, each spinning clockwise, then the next row counter clockwise and so forth. The mouth glowed the same ultraviolet purple, and the outside red lines glowed out from its segmented parts.

It was a ship, Tony thought, a Demon would command.

"The Umbra is a ship that exists to negate all. Its name means shadow, but really it is more of a void. No world has survived her plunder if she wished for the planet's annihilation. You can bow, you can kneel, you can pledge upmost fealty to The Mad Titan, but if all he wants is blood and bones, nothing will save you. Your existence will simply be undone." Loki's voice, for once, didn't hold any emotion, for once. He sounded like he just stated fact, and that caught Tony's attention. He would have to talk to Loki about what sort of firepower they could expect from them.

The mood in the room took a considerable nosedive.

"Well, as much as this awkward bonding experience was fun and rewarding, I have some projects to work on. I'll catch up with you guys when Legolas and Nat come back from Fury's booty call." Tony filled up his drink again and retreated to his workshop, seeing if he could start on the proximity barrier, and maybe try to figure out what Sailor Moon's toxin was like, without a sample.

Youki worked differently than magic, almost like Sesshomaru could mute his completely, whereas Loki's magic always had a little residue. He also had no idea how after Sesshomaru talked to Loki on the roof that Sesshomaru's magic signature disappeared. Had to do with the N*sync sword he suspected.

Hours passed, as did a few cocktails.

He started a base replica of Sesshomaru's youki, in theory. With some modicum of promise he could make it probably physically recreate his 'artificial' youki. Well, at least he thought so. It was all a matter of charging the air in a particular way, and manipulating the wavelengths and frequencies. With the large amount of data that Jarvis gathered from when Sesshomaru flashed his youki before, he could probably get close to replicating it soon.

The toxin, however, he would definitely need a sample of. The work on the youki would also go faster if he had a sample of it as well.

"Sir, miss Potts has returned with the glass repairman, Lord Sesshomaru's dry cleaning and your outfit." Jarvis reported.

"Oh OK, and you can't refer to him as Lord, if anyone should Lord in my own house it should be me." Tony put down his instruments and began to bound up the stairs.
"What should I call him sir? I doubt he would approve of anything you currently refer to him as."
Jarvis answered.

"I don't know, be creative." Tony smiled as Pepper came in, all smiles and looking fit. She was
definitely up to something, and at least she did her hair the way that flatters her the most.

"You're absolutely scary you know that? But seeing Sesshomaru slingshot Loki out of my window
and kick him down was a highlight of my life. Jarvis saved the video." Tony greeted Pepper and
she put some paperwork in his hand, still the only one who was allowed to hand him things.

"Yes I am aware but it was really more for me than you. You need to sign for the window estimate,
these quarterlies, oh and for the tailor." Tony scribbled nonsense on what he thought were the right
lines.

"Oh tailor, what suit are you going to make wear to the Gala now?" Tony leaned back waiting to
not be impressed and Pepper held out two garment bags.

"I already picked out a suit for you last month for the upcoming Gala in Pittsburgh on the 17th,
which as Tony Stark, you promised me you would attend. This one is Sesshomaru's dry cleaning.
The dry cleaners were astounded by the material, they kept saying it was magical silk. The tailor
sadly couldn't find any magic silk so normal human silk will have to do…" Tony inwardly groaned
at the prospect of the Gala and Pepper put Sailor Moon's outfit down. Tony all the sudden had a
bad feeling.

"Pepper...what are you talking about?" Tony's jaw dropped as he was confronted with an outfit that
was an exact replica of Sesshomaru's, except where Sesshomaru's was white, his was red, where
Sesshomaru's was red, his was gold, and the sash thing was black.

'This is the worst thing I think I have ever seen. Isn't this cultural appropriation? There is no way
I'm wearing this kimono.' Stark held up the yukata like it might burn him.

'Sesshomaru and Natasha informed me of a certain bet that took place on the Quinjet, you know
the one where you didn't tell me you were attacked by a Demon Lord and we have been over this,
that you have to tell me these things. You apparently said you would make your own Demon outfit
if Sesshomaru managed to bring Loki to Stark Tower. We need to work on your gambling, by the
way. So. I helped you uphold your end of it." Pepper handed him the outfit and his own ass. Tony's
jaw dropped, it was official, Sesshomaru went from best thing to happen that day, to absolute
worst.

"This should be a fireable offense." Tony looked at the outfit and cringed, he didn't even have a
cue how to put the damn thing on.

"You can't fire me. And just be lucky Sesshomaru allowed you to have your color palette. Natasha
was gunning for pink." Pepper smiled triumphantly. Tony paled, he was not about to wear pink.

"Hey ma'am, hate to be a bother but you ain't got any broken glass windows here." The glass guy,
Merle, came back and sure enough the glass pane was intact. Tony didn't even notice it happen.

"Huh. He's been unusually helpful." Tony still held the outfit, trying to think of a place to stash it.
Or burn it, maybe he could reuse the fire pit Sailor Moon made. No Thor washed it out with his
rain dance. Damn. Maybe he could put it in the oven, and then have Loki fix it after it caught on
fire.

"Hmmm. You're so right. Thanks Merle you can go; Jarvis will see you out." Pepper turned to Tony
and whispered "Loki fixed a window he was thrown out of? Is this really the same guy?" Pepper looked astounded, looking around to see if Loki was hiding or lurking somewhere.

"He also fixed the microwave Point Break totaled this morning." Tony added, still a bit confused.

"Well, if Sesshomaru sticks around I'm making sure Rin goes to the dentist, all that ice cream can't be good. I'm off, I have to go back. Also if he sticks around..." Pepper typed a reminder in her phone quickly and Tony knew exactly what Pepper was referring to.

"Yeah, yeah, I'll tell Rhodey about the Empire Strikes Back." Tony sighed exasperated. He was not looking forward to telling Rhodey about the squatters he had in his basement. Rhodey might shoot him. Might. Actually, he would probably try to shoot Loki.

Or call a predator drone strike on the tower. Tony just swallowed, he didn't know which was worse, the outfit or telling Rhodes about Loki and his Demon bestie.

"Good. And I told Natasha about the outfit so don't play dumb." Pepper called out as she clipped down to the elevator "Let me know how battle strategy brain storm goes!" Tony huffed.

"Will do!...God I'm incinerating you." Tony said in a fake cheerful voice. looked down at the outfit in disgust. "How do cos-players look at themselves in the mirror, like literally and figuratively?!!" Tony muttered,

'Great, if I destroy it, Natasha will probably make me body paint the outfit on. How. Just how did I suddenly not become in total control of my Tower?! Oh, yeah, that's right, a certain uppity, arrogant, apathetic Demon Lord who, apparently I want to ride like a joystick in my wet dream. Good job Tony Stark, you're officially in trouble.' Tony, finally, finally admitted it, coincidentally right as the object of his frustration walked back through the door, flashing his cold, gold eyes his way for the briefest of moments before his ears lifted and his lip curled upward ever so slightly.

He was still holding the stupid outfit. Caught red-silk handed, Tony just put his head in his hands. This, mayhem-magnet, sexually frustrating Demon Lord was officially the bane of his existence.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay in this chapter! I was busy on another fic, and i was waffling on how i wanted this one to end!

Thank you for all your continued support! It truly means a lot to me and makes my day :) You are all so great, I was going to a specialized shout out, but i wanted to get this chapter out since it was so late in coming!

-TL
Loki and the Broken Blade.

*( *

Loki was not nervous. He definitely embodied calm and collected. Wringing his hands together and pacing were practices calm Gods did too.

'It's not like the fates of Midgard and Asgard depend on my introverted friend befriending a group of hostile mortals and convincing them that I'm not actually their enemy. Though, I learned long ago not to underestimate him. I remember the first time Thor and I met him was eventful to say the least.' Loki slipped into a faded memory.

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"Ah, King Odin of Asgard! Welcome to our Lands! This is my son Sesshomaru!" Loki looked on bored. He was meeting yet another spoiled, meat headed Demon who would fawn over his brother.

Stepping forward, however, was someone Loki didn't expect. He looked delicate, like something made of spun glass and silk. His sharp gold eyes looked like they calculated everything.

Loki didn't bother hiding his puzzled look at the Demon, he certainly didn't look like the typical impulsive, clumsy Demons he had met before.

He also had a big crescent moon on his forehead. Definitely odd.

Loki furrowed his eyebrows at the Dog Demon as his sharp, apathetic gold eyes studied him. He appeared about as excited to be here has Loki was.

'Let's get this song and dance over with.' Loki rolled his eyes and tapped his foot softly, luckily unnoticed by Allfather.

"Aye, a pleasure to meet you at last Lord Inu no Taisho, as you may have heard, these are my sons." Allfather answered and before anything else could happen, Thor thundered.

"This is your son?! But he is rather puny, and looks like an elven girl." Thor acted out and Loki could hear Allfather's armor clink as he tensed up. Idiot, we are guests in their Lands! Thor took a bite of his apple.

Loki straightened like an arrow when he saw the Demon Lord, Inu no Taisho, set his jaw and clench his fist, clearly offended.

Of course his brother would offend the one Demon Lord who had a weapon that rivals Gungnir in strength. Loki had heard rumors of Sounga, the Sword of Hell, and from what he could feel, the sword on the Demon Lord's hip proved those rumors true.

Loki, as he often did, prepared for the worse.

"Father, who is this cart ox?" Sesshomaru countered flawlessly and Loki cracked a laugh.
Cart ox. Thor. Loki couldn't believe it. No one had ever said anything like that to Thor. Ever. The smile didn't leave his face, for once Thor had been on the receiving end of an insult and not himself.

The tension dissipated, and the fathers chuckled good naturedly while Thor frowned. Loki stared at the fair Demon before him, who looked like he would rather be anywhere else.

"I am no beast of burden you uncivilized Demon! I am Thor, Prince of Asgard! God of Thunder!" Thor introduced himself proudly stepping forward, mouth full of apple.

"You claim I am uncivilized yet you speak to me whilst chewing food." Sesshomaru spoke without a hint of emotion and gazed on, completely unimpressed, almost looking as if he'd fall asleep. Allfather nudged Loki, knowing that Loki may be able to smooth things over, of course.

"I am Loki, Prince of Asgard, Sorcerer and God of Mischief. My brother can have quite the appetite and speaks rashly when hungry. How may we address you?" Loki stepped forward, bowing slightly. Sesshomaru turned to the God of Mischief, eyes a bit wide. Sesshomaru didn't step forward, instead deciding to stand beside his father.

"You are permitted to call me Sesshomaru. I am the heir to the Western Lands." Sesshomaru stated bowing towards Loki slightly, as if giving them permission to call him by his own name.

What an arrogant Demon! Loki raised his eyebrows.

Just because this Demon called out his brother did not mean he was worthy of his time. Loki had far better things to do than get to know this aloof Demon.

Thor beside him took another bite of his apple.

"Sesshomaru, you are to face Thor in the upcoming melee tournament, and to study alongside Loki." Inu no Taisho, Lord of the Western Lands informed. Sesshomaru showed no reaction.

Loki fought the urge to groan. He had been reduced to a babysitter for this small, young Demon. There was no certain way this Demon, though witty, could keep up with him intellectually. Demons were notorious for only following their instincts and were only taught the basics. Loki knew he would hate this visit to Midgard.

Then Loki let the rest of the words the Lord of the West spoke sink in, this twig of a Demon was to face Thor in a melee tournament?! Was this Demon Lord daft?!

"Allfather! Surely this Lord jests! This little Demon is no worthy opponent." Thor protested and before anyone could respond, a flash of a green whip lassoed the apple from Thor's hand and pilfered it, retracting the whip and apple into a small clawed hand.

Loki's jaw dropped. That was fast, faster than he could move.

Sesshomaru looked at the apple, then looked back at Thor. He then closed the distance, Thor's half eaten apple clutched in his outstretched hand.

Loki had to commend the tactic, he certainly proved to be not only intelligent, but quick and accurate as well.

"You lost this, Storm God." Sesshomaru, completely deadpanned, stated slowly and Thor grabbed back his apple with a tanned hand, not saying anything.
Loki bent over in laughter while Inu no Taisho smirked and Allfather huffed.

This Demon, this Sesshomaru, perhaps wasn't such a lost cause after all. This could be a Demon he could get behind. And eventually he did.

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Now he found himself on the roof of the tower, scanning for Sesshomaru's youki, but he was keeping very well hidden. Unsurprisingly so, Sesshomaru lived a very private life of which he let few people inside. Sesshomaru most likely needed his space from all these prying mortals.

Though the fact he had shared the story of his half brother with their ever intrepid and perhaps overreaching leader showed he was at least warming up to them.

The encroaching sunset painted the city into dusky, fiery hues. He could see why they were having issues adjusting to this realm, it was all glass and metal. It didn't help that he and Jaken were the only Demons left either.

"Waiting for your good husband to return from work?" Loki knew that was Rogers, and turned around. He didn't expect any of the Avengers to seek out his company, especially humorously. He had resigned himself to being a presence they would have to keep alive at best, tolerate at most.

'It would be quite disastrous to try to kill the one person who knew the most about their enemy, pending of course Sesshomaru actually convinces these lost creatures.' Loki uncrossed his arms, putting his hands on his hips.

"The life of a kept man can be rather dull." Loki quirked a slight dark smile. Loki wasn't sure why the Captain was reaching out to him, he supposed it was his nature. Loki had noticed that conflict within the Avengers was something Rogers avidly liked to avoid. Deciding to play along, Loki let Rogers get close to him, standing side by side on the helipad.

"You know, I..." Rogers started and it was then Loki noticed he had neither shield nor weapon.

'Surely he must know I could throw him from the roof, or impale him, or roast him with magic or countless other atrocities before his allies found him. I could kill him outright, Rogers is no fool, he leads this band of misfits!' Loki felt the puzzle pieces connect in his head and his green eyes widened.

'This idealist trusted him! By the Nines...this could work! If the leader trusted what had transpired thus far, he would be at least open to hearing Sesshomaru out!' Loki let loose a wide smile of victory, clenching his fists.

"One does not always need words to articulate what one means." Loki helped him and turned to face him fully, searching his wide blue eyes for any lie, and finding none. He did know how to find lies after all.

Loki had expected perhaps only Romanoff to believe him, recalling their conversation on the helicarrier three years prior where he told her she killed and lied in the service of liars and killers. He figured if anyone would believe him it would be her. She knew exactly what he did, because she once did it herself.

"True, actions speak louder than words." Rogers agreed and for a few minutes they both stood in comfortable silence. Loki's smile remained on his face; his former home, Asgard, and his current residence, Midgard, may live to see another year after all. Loki may just get his saccharine sweet revenge yet.
"Uncle Loki! Hey I found them! Uncle Loki look, Rin got you another ice cream! This one is lime sherbet! Lord Sesshomaru says you may like this one better because it's less sweet." Loki was legitimately surprised; he didn't hadn't sensed that Sesshomaru had returned. He accepted the ice cream as Rin turned to Rogers. He took a lick of the tart ice cream; these limes of Midgard were quite good.

"I drew you Bedclothes!" Loki choked on his ice cream in laughter. Rogers, not understanding what she said, narrowed his eyes suspiciously at Loki who just smiled broadly.

"Lord Sesshomaru says your shield is really strong so I have you beating Naraku with it, even though he said you don't know who that is." Rin handed Rogers the drawing of him beating some sort of monster to death. It was actually pretty good.

'Sesshomaru must encourage her skills to develop.' Loki thought, remembering their own calligraphy lessons, especially the one after Sesshomaru lost his sanity and shredded those five Aesir warriors into streamers.

He hoped he would never see that form of Sesshomaru's again.

"Uh, thanks Rin." Rogers humored Rin, taking the drawing and smiling. She raised her hand and he high-fived it good naturedly.

It was then Sesshomaru came out upon the roof, wearing his traditional garments, armor and pelt with Tenseiga and Bakusaiga at his side. He had always looked imposing, but after seeing him in Midguardian clothing, now he appeared even more so. He did however, have those ostentatious sunglasses still on top of his head.

However, who followed him up next caused Loki to almost drop his ice cream and Rogers to almost, almost curse in shock.

Because Stark stood next to Sesshomaru in a matching garish red and gold version of his exact garment. Stark, red-faced in embarrassment, was eating his chocolate ice cream. Banner, walking behind him, was smiling from ear to ear.

'Sesshomaru, the murderous, feared by all mortals, Demon Lord of the Western Lands, now stands side by side with this insufferable mortal inventor who is eating ice cream Sesshomaru bartered for him. I could not have envisioned anything more backwards.' Loki shook his head. He had no words for what was transpiring between them except seeing Stark fling the sleeves of his outfit uncomfortably around was by far the best gift he could have possibly received.

'It still doesn't make up for the earlier window incident. I will get that Dog Demon back for such treachery.' Loki mused, knowing truthfully that Sesshomaru did not betray him but in this case it would be far more entertaining to seek revenge than to let such an act slide. Especially for revenge against that haughty inventor.

'That pompous inventor thinks Midgard's weapons, technology, and science make them superior to my own magic and Sesshomaru's weapons. What folly. Stark believes my own magic as crude and Sesshomaru as slow minded for being from the past. I doubt any of the Avengers, save Thor, respect our power and intellect. They need to if they are to trust us in leading the strategy to defend Midgard.' Loki's thoughts and magic darkened and swirled in him like the beginnings of a typhoon.

While at first, Loki had claimed that he did not care about what the Avengers thought of him, the
past few days of him getting used to the tower, caused a grating feeling in him that Tony Stark
looked down on his magic. Something in him sparked that made him almost want to prove to these
mortals just what he could do. Most likely because, if he wasn't a powerful, magical weapon, what
exactly was he?

"Tony? Are you guys going to do a reenactment?" Rogers began to chuckle. Loki snapped out of
his reverie.

He then had a disturbing thought, was this all some sort of mind-game for Stark? Was he
attempting to show Sesshomaru as ridiculous for his attire? Right before he would address them
with his strategy?!

Loki's darkened magic accelerated, twisting within him.

"...I am to assume this is not an attempt at mockery am I not?" Loki's unusually cold tone was
laced with caution. Loki carefully observed Sesshomaru who shockingly appeared pleased, well as
pleased as Sesshomaru publicly looked.

Something was afoot. It was as if Sesshomaru knew about the outfit.

"No, you see Tony here lost a bet on the Quinjet from New Mexico to here that if Sesshomaru
managed to bring you here he'd make an outfit like his and wear it." Banner explained and Loki
immediately relaxed, mouth slicing into a knowing grin. His magic snaking from his fingers,
powdered and he resumed eating his lime sherbet.

He never would have thought Stark's antics would entertain him so. Stark crossed his arms and
glared a heated look at Sesshomaru who simply ignored him.

'Oh how the mighty have fallen, right Stark? It looks like your own skepticism of our abilities
indeed backfired.' Loki's green eyes flashed in vindication.

On cue the pelt appeared on Tony instead. Loki burst out laughing.

"Well done Stark, and here you stated you wouldn't underestimate us….What did you call us?
Sesshoki? I will state that it is a testament to your intelligence that you could at least put the
garment on correctly." Rin and Sesshomaru were right, he preferred lime sherbet. Loki licked his
ice cream as Banner sighed as Stark, yet again, found himself entwined in Sesshomaru's pelt.

The first time Stark had been stuck in Seshomaru's pelt Loki was not able to adequately enjoy it
due to the fact that Sesshomaru had just scryed. Well, also, he had just pulled eight arrows from his
chest.

"Get this off! The bet should be null in void anyway, because technically Sesshomaru didn't bring
Reindeer Games here, he brought himself. I'm just a magnanimous individual." Stark struggled
with the pelt and the ice cream. Sesshomaru stood next to him, face placid, ignoring his struggle,
ears twitching in victory.

"Rin thinks you look quite noble Stark! You and Lord Sesshomaru look like you could rule the
Western Lands together!" Rin complimented. Loki knew he was the only one to understand what
she said and his eyes bulged out in astonishment.

Did Rin also notice how Sho and Stark interacted? Sesshomaru turned to Stark and looked him up
and down in appraisal that only caused Stark to struggle and redden more.

"He needs refinement." Sesshomaru should have grinned when Banner took a photo of them both.
Rin bounced in glee and Loki couldn't tell if he was just humoring Rin, or if his flirtations towards
Stark had solidified into something more.

"Refinement?! I'll have you know I can be captivatingly refined; despite being dressed as a
Japanese MC Hammer. I just need sunglasses…and a drink." Loki saw Sesshomaru put a hand to
his head, guarding his sunglasses, as Loki began to finish his ice cream.

"Man of Iron! Have you perchance adorned your mother's drapes?!!" Thor came flying by and Loki
lost it. He laughed so much green magic sparks shot out of his hands, he almost dropped his ice
cream. Again.

It had been a while since he laughed that hard at something Thor had said.

"Ok. That's it. Everyone is kicked out of Stark Tower. I'm done. You're all fired, especially you
two Team Rocket." Stark pointed to Sesshomaru and Loki who looked at each other, puzzled.
Team Rocket? What exactly made them a rocket? Stark must revel in making references they did
not understand. Loki began to walk towards them, finishing his ice cream.

Rin ran up and high-fived Thor when he landed.

He sensed something on the horizon at the same time Sesshomaru did. Loki turned to view the
Quinjet approaching. When it got close it dipped suddenly to the right then straightened.

Loki didn't like the looks of it, and Sesshomaru's eyes went cold and his youki flared into a blue
wall. He directly blocked Loki and the rest of the mortals from the landing Quinjet.

Loki turned to face Sesshomaru whose face revealed nothing, but his ears were planted flat against
his head.

The Quinjet finally landed and the doors opened only for Romanoff to slam Clint against the side
of the jet. Loki couldn't make out what she said, but he was certain Sesshomaru could because he
didn't look pleased and his ears pricked up.

"He meant to fire." Sesshomaru said in the softest of whispers, meant only for Loki to hear.

"Fire...the guns? At me?" Loki wasn't surprised that Clint still felt angry, more so his careless
choice in tactic.

"Me. Not that this Sesshomaru would have let that device do damage." Sesshomaru turned his back
on the Quinjet all ice and long talons. Now that surprised Loki.

'Clint can mess with me all he pleases, but the minute he redirects that ire will be the moment he
regrets it. Sesshomaru won't tolerate it. Neither will I.' Loki's face darkened. Due to him hiding his
emotions less well than Sesshomaru, and the shove, Stark picked up that something was amiss.

"Ugh. Don't tell me Legolas has his g-string in a twist, he isn't even dressed like a bad video game
character." Stark walked out to meet Sesshomaru and Loki.

"...He needs an outlet." Loki supplied, Stark either didn't hear him, or didn't respond.

"Natasha! Barton! I drew you!" Rin ran out to meet them and for the swiftest of moments Loki
feared the archer would do something unwise. He didn't; and accepted the picture looking a bit
more sedate.

"Love the new look Tony. Very Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." Romanoff smirked
victoriously, looking at her picture which showed her attacking a braided man with a very large sword and a cross on his forehead.

"Actually fun fact: Sesshomaru here is a Dog Demon…and he isn't a huge fan of Tiger or probably Dragon Demons." Rogers informed and Romanoff pointed to the pelt, nodding as if she could see the connection between the pelt and dog fur.

Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side. Oh dear… Rogers and that big mouth of his, didn't he understand that Sesshomaru would sooner eat their 'human fare' than know Thor and I told the Avengers of his past?!

"My Lands have… once had both Dragon and Tiger Demons… how did you discern my opinion of them? As of this morning you professed ignorance of Demons all together." Sesshomaru asked suspiciously gold eyes darting between Rogers, Stark and Romanoff.

"We got a crash course in your backstory Sailor Moon, complete with family photos." Stark admitted and Sesshomaru whipped around, eyes blazing to Loki. Loki pointed to Thor.

Thor gave his best 'who me?' face.

Fabulous. Sesshomaru now knew they had gone and spoken about him without him present. That would certainly irritate the private Demon. Sesshomaru uttered a low, chest rumbling growl, and for a moment Loki wondered if he would witness Sesshomaru engage Thor in a spar.

"Oh no, you're now literally changing into him, Tony. Are you going to draw the line at going grey and face tattoos?" Clint greeted good naturedly. Perhaps his urge to attack them was indeed a lapse in good sanity.

"Nah, gonna get a matching set. And if Anderson Cooper can do it I can." Tony gestured to his whole self and Banner rolled his eyes.

Loki, not about to let that opportunity to pass him by, snapped his fingers and appearing on Tony's face was an identical set of Sesshomaru's markings.

"Loki..." Sesshomaru growled again in warning and Loki smirked, this would be revenge against them both. Against Sho for throwing him through the window and for Stark's arrogance.

"What? Oh… tell me Reindeer Games didn't." Stark began and Romanoff took out her phone and took a photo, then showed the result to Stark.

Rin simply pointed in awe, face lit with excitement and joy.

"Tony I think the phrase you're looking for is 'be careful what you wish for.'" Clint's mouth quirked up into what Loki would describe as a reluctant smile, almost as if he didn't want to smile at anything Loki did.

Banner took another photo.

"See, refined! I think I pull them off better than you." Stark pointed to Sesshomaru whose ears rose with his eyebrows at the sheer audacity of the statement.

"Your senses are faulty, human." Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles. Loki, supremely amused, knew that Sesshomaru must harbor a healthy regard for Stark to not rip his vocal chords out.

Or Loki's own vocal chords since his glamour was in an indirect reference to when a Demon takes
a mate they inherit a marking of the other. Loki vanished the glamour away before Sesshomaru's patience ran too thin.

"Let us return to the matter at hand shall we?" Loki suggested, realizing his little glamour may have created too much of a diversion.

"Yeah… How was the meeting with Fury?" Rogers asked, reeling in his rag-tag group.

"Fun, in the sense that he thinks Loki is Sesshomaru, which he was, but actually isn't. He also wants to create a formal extra-terrestrial customs protocol so Thor isn't everyone's meet-and-greet. Fury is, however, convinced that Loki has compromised the Magic detectors since he can't get a bead on his magic signature here in New York." Romanoff reported with a good amount of snark. Thor crossed his arms indignantly.

Loki's eyebrows furrowed, he wasn't masking his magic, he couldn't any longer…Sesshomaru must have done something.

"Sounds like a productive waste of time. You missed Thor blow up my microwave with a jar of spaghetti sauce, Sailor Moon throw Reindeer Games out my window, and story time complete with pop up pictures. But at least you made it in time for dress up!" Tony continued to fuss with the pelt as he devoured his ice cream. Clint and Romanoff looked at each other in disbelief.

Loki began to move towards the rooftop access, not particularly wanting to relive today's events of him cleaning up Thor's mess, yet again, and his friend's surprise "betrayal".

'Well, at least I got him back with Stark's glamour… however I am sure I will be on the receiving end of his ire once more once he realizes I showed them what his Father and what he looked like, during the final battle for the Western Lands.' Loki smirked, a bounce added to his step, Sesshomaru greatly disliked being compared to his father.

"Wait, why did you throw Loki out a window?" He heard Clint ask incredulously.

"...I bartered with Lady Potts." Sesshomaru admitted, following Loki. He heard Clint suppress a laugh, that sounded better than the dark look he sported before.

"Like I said before, it hasn't been boring." Banner chimed in.

"Things with Tony usually aren't, but I must say I think this time it has to do with your house guests." Romanoff picked up and twirled Stark's sash. Stark slapped her hand away.

"...damn squatters." Stark grumbled and Loki spotted a twinge of satisfaction on Sesshomaru's face. Precocious Demon. He had certainly opened up more in this time than he ever had in the past. Most likely because he had to, to properly adapt here.

They made their way down to the main room and Loki felt his gut tie itself up in knots as everyone took their seats across the room. He remained standing next to Sesshomaru, conjuring a map in the air.

'Sesshomaru isn't one to speak a great deal. He may get agitated. Or they may just not believe him. Regardless, I'll go after The Other, on the Relentless and do as much damage as possible before I'm stopped. I have to believe in Thor that he will convince Odin to return Sesshomaru to his own time if they won't believe him.' Loki thought of his contingency plans with a fake, wan smile taped on his face.

"Lord Sesshomaru! What is going on?!" Jaken, still Jack, walked in, holding the staff of two heads,
and strawberry ice cream. So Jaken had been converted to 'human' food after all, curious indeed.

"Stay Jaken. I am conducting a war assembly." Sesshomaru gestured to the seat on the other side of Rin who sat next to Romanoff.

"Yeah. Alright Doomsday Room is officially in session. Show us your stuff Sailor Moon, how would you blow an invasion while fooling your superiors." Stark clapped his hands, and as if on cue, the pelt reappeared on Sesshomaru. Stark looked positively relieved, rolling his shoulder and brushing off remaining fluff.

Loki conjured a city, complete with a wall in a harbor. A familiar layout they were given when studying and not unlike New York City itself.

Sesshomaru straightened, his face impassive and unexpressive as ever.

"...I would begin with procuring unreliable spies. Giving my superiors faulty intelligence on the general populace, while spreading word of our preparing forces." Sesshomaru looked at the map, standing tall with a practiced command. Loki conjured black pawns in the middle of the city of white pawns.

"I would then make public displays. Denouncing their culture and their intelligence is an easy way to provoke dissent against a new ruler, no matter how disliked or weak their current one is. I would make it clear I am to be obeyed." Sesshomaru's voice grew cold. Loki remembered Stuttgart and being captured. He magicked black stages in the city.

"If the objective is to rule successfully, the leader needs to be fearsome, but not distrusted by his own, productive peasantry." Sesshomaru elaborated, eyes piercing Rogers' for effect. Rogers was the leader of the Avengers after all.

Loki recalled his conversation with the Other over the matter. It wasn't that hard to convince him that a show of power would make these mortals crumple.

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"Godling, so you wish to show these mortals your might, do you? What gives you the impression you are so much higher than the mortals you want to subjugate?" The Other sat tall in his obsidian high backed chair, and Loki knew was smirking under his mask. Behind the Other the glassed wall showed the ultra violet core of The Relentless spinning slowly like a windmill.

"Only that you chose me for this invasion, my forger. I wish to stomp them into the dirt they crawl over. Stuttgart is not only a mission critical Operation for the portal, but with proper preparation, it can be a demonstration of our prowess as well. The people who exist in this province of Midgard have been loyal to charismatic figures of power in the past." Loki refused to tremble before the Other. It wasn't only out of fear, no, but out of barely bridled fury.

Fury against the Other, against Thor, against Odin, against everything! His anger tingled his magic, there was a very true part to the Other's words. He wanted someone for once to bow to him in fealty, for once!

The small, rational part of Loki's mind had begun to thaw the ice of the Other's magic around his mind, and his memories. He, logically, knew that he didn't want these mortal's backs to the sky for him, but...nonetheless his magic and his emotions were ravenous for something like it to occur.

"Very well, my Broken Blade, make the mortal's foreheads press into their precious Earth, remind them what filth they spawned from." The Other waved him off and Loki left the gunmetal grey
command room in a ruffle of green cape and brushed bronze.

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"Gathering false or incomplete information on the land's military positions, numbers, and capabilities is imperative. I'd report this information back and plan a tactically sound plan based on that information, yet unsound to actual facts." Sesshomaru paused, putting his fist to his chin, tilting his head as he looked out the window facing him. Loki sensed his nervousness, even though it didn't show. It was difficult explaining strategy, much less relating it to a realm five hundred years advanced to his own.

'He is doing quite well however. Step by step he is following exactly what I did.' Loki stole a glance to the other Avengers, the only mortal looking at him was Rin, who waved. He waved back silently, one mortal child he could say he liked.

"...I would leave all scouting and communication constructs intact, so my enemy may still signal their own troop movements, and see my own forces arrange and monitor my own forces." Loki began to gain confidence; this was indeed exactly what he had done. He had not disrupted their communications nor satellites. Loki allowed SHIELD to coordinate a strike after all.

"My own forces would construct improper siege weapons, ones that could not create a large enough breech in their city walls for all my invading forces to enter. I would also commence the attack on a city of large economic and cultural importance, not a military stronghold. I'd make it appear as though I wanted to demoralize and strike fear into them first. We'd burn their fields, sink civilian vessels, and poison their ground water." Sesshomaru searched the room.

Loki thought of the position and the diminutive size of the portal he'd created, and his choice of the city New York. Yes, he had needed a strong power source, but he was Loki of Asgard, he could have found other, more strategically sound means.

"Why economic and not militaristic?" Rogers asked, disrupting the harmonious flow of Sesshomaru's voice.

"I would want them profitable. Devastating their largest trade port would hamper their usefulness. Secondly, this would catalyze fragmented troops from across their lands, knowing that their own civilian cities could be next, to a rallying point. Thirdly, it would be an easily accessible entryway for the enemy forces. Additionally, the military strongholds would still be operational to attack my disoriented fleet and encumbered ground troops in a crowded trade harbor." Sesshomaru patiently explained, and Loki conjured in the city wall, a small hole, a fleet of ships that were impeded by civilian ships and military ones approaching from their flank.

Loki pursed his lips, The Mad Titan certainly wished to own Midgard, it being the best access point for the other eight realms, Asgard of course being one of them. Before he did not desire Asgard, but now that it held the Tesseract and the infinity gauntlet, he did.

"With a breech too small to facilitate all my troops occupation, the ones that enter the city will be picked off, and my long range support will be without clear shots, and on the low ground. The ground offensive would eventually be routed." Sesshomaru flicked his wrist, and Loki swirled his magic in the form of troops stuck in a bottle neck, with the archers stuck behind the vanguard, being sniped by the archers atop the wall.

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"You wish to open our portal using that one mortal's power ring under that structure? Why that
"civilian city, my Broken Blade?" The Other questioned, rising from his chair for the first time since Loki had reported to only him. Loki before reported to both him and The Mad Titan and the Other had been standing then, but all stood, or knelt in the presence of the Mad Titan. Loki was currently kneeling.

"That structure was constructed by one of the Avengers. It would be severely demoralizing to have his own power device used against him. Secondly, Midgard's resolve has crumbled now that I have scattered their precious defenders. Once I make the portal operational, the creator of the tower, who is of some intelligence, will return to it and I shall turn him against his allies. He shall prove useful in the manufacturing of new weaponry." Loki, by this time, had been able to control himself more in front of the Other.

He felt a bit more sure now. He never wanted to rule Midgard. He had managed to sort his emotions out better with more of his magic returning. He would betray an oath he made long ago to never claim sovereignty of Midgard if he conquered it now. Even though that Demon no longer existed, he would keep that oath.

Loki also, knew, somewhat, that wanting to enslave mortals Thor had come to adore so was not proper revenge against what Thor had done to him.

"Proceed then, Godling, just make haste with this portal. The primary fleet grows impatient." The Other gave almost distrusting look before waving him off and Loki's shoulders relaxed unseen under his armor. These fractured Avengers would surely rally to save their precious New York, and he would buy them the time with an undersized portal.

Loki was thankful that in a prior meeting he convinced the Other that Midgard's military would stand down in fear, not willing to fire their missiles at such an important civilian cities. Loki himself did not trust that another province on Midgard, such as the Russian Federation, or perhaps even SHIELD would not decimate New York to prevent the invasion. That issue, however, was not his to solve. It might even be a bit of fun to watch part of Midgard burn the way he did.

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"To prevent my fleet from escaping back sea bound, I would discreetly have my ships tied together and launch a fire attack upon my fleet, sinking them in the harbor. It would be a great morale boost for the defending Lands, a humiliating defeat for my superiors, and would take years to construct another attempt." Sesshomaru finished and Loki could have embraced him. That was exactly what Stark did with the tactical missile. Loki didn't hide his smile; his friend had not lost his edge in the five hundred and fifty-three years they were apart.

Loki, feeling unbridled pride for his friend, felt his fingertips light up green. This was splendid! Indeed, for once a victory he could claim as his own! This strategy in bringing Sho here was brilliant!

"My superiors certainly would blame me in the failure, leaving my only options to defect, flee or be otherwise reprimanded." Sesshomaru's eyes flicked over to Loki, looking for confirmation of a sound strategy, face neutral when spotting the elation on Loki's face. Sho couldn't have been better!

…'or otherwise reprimanded…'The previous happiness and triumph he felt began to corrode.

Loki's magic spun out of control within him, the magic coiling around his lungs, suffocating him as he remembered another time he almost suffocated.
'Abyss, an endless, magic decaying, life draining abyss. This is what I let go for. This fate, this malady of ambition of mine. Protecting a throne from a brother who wasn't ready, committing patricide, regicide, all in the name of an Allfather who scorned me for what he taught me to be.'

Loki tumbled, all the while his magic and his vitality leeching from his body like water through a sieve. He would eventually die here, in this void. And that was ok. His stomach, dense as lead, would eventually fade, just like the rest of him.

His legacy, he hoped, would fade too like a scroll left in the sun too long. He did not want nor need to be remembered as what he was now.

'I was never to be equal. Thor would always stand on my shoulders. Odin would only regard Thor as his one true son. Odin putting a Frost Giant on the throne of Asgard? Reckless, Absurd, Grotesque! That is who I am. A grotesque, abomination of an existence. A fraud, a cheat, an illusion of a God! Someone such as I shouldn't bother existing, there is no inherent value in it. My gamble did not pay off, my luck has long since atrophied. A Frost Giant who attempted to destroy his own race to stave off the destruction of an adopted home that scorned him. My destiny was to fail, my kismet: the void.'

Loki’s green magic began to surge and roll in his chest like a hurricane.

He scanned the Avengers, they all looked grave, but contemplative. Including Clint. Maybe he wouldn't be sent to a detention center in SHIELD, or sent back to Asgard. Maybe he would keep what was left of his fragile, artificial sanity.

'Eventually the void eroded my sanity. My mind melted into a murky puddle, all ridges or folds of memory, recent or old, important or trivial, fleshed together into a muddled mass. A blurry haze of faces I couldn't recognize, voices I didn't quite know, and wounds I couldn't remember receiving or bestowing. The void erased my identity. As I fell dying, all I knew was a nebulous but overwhelming sense of despair, which eventually fermented into a festering knot of hatred.' Loki recalled hitting rock bottom, ironically a place called 'Sanctuary'.

But fortune would again frown upon me. My deteriorated immortality was not allowed death, I would not rest in peace.

Loki felt his palms dampen in sweat and he vigorously rubbed them together. Jaken, still in his Jack appearance, beamed in approval and Rin jumped off her seat and ran up to Loki, holding her hand out for a high five. He reciprocated and Sesshomaru looked directly at Stark.

"...There's always a sequel isn't there." He heard Clint mutter. Stark just stared at Sesshomaru.

"Ok, so the whole 'slow of mind' thing, you can forget that. And can you like do podcasts or audibles or something?" Stark put a hand over his mouth, thinking, his tone serious despite the jesting nature of his words. Sesshomaru straightened, his ears pricking up in approval.
"Sesshomaru, were you told how Loki conducted his invasion?" Banner asked, his voice laced with ardent curiosity. The other mortals, aside from Romanoff, turned with him as if demanding a convincing answer to the question.

"You dare imply I would waste my time and dishonor myself by passing off another's strategy as my own?" Sesshomaru's knuckles cracked. Loki grimaced, he figured at some point someone would ask that infernal question. As if he would compromise the whole strategy by telling Sesshomaru what he had done. "This Sesshomaru has no knowledge of it, other than…Loki's tactic of procuring spies." Sesshomaru cast his gaze Clint's direction who stiffened slightly.

"My Lord Sesshomaru is no liar or cheat! He would never say something was his that wasn't!" Rin's clear voice rang out, and she twisted on the sofa to cross her arms at Banner.

"Lady Rin stated Son of Taisho is no liar or cheat, and that he'd never claim something that was his, that wasn't. Which, to my knowledge is true." Thor interpreted, speaking up for the first time, and not quite sounding like himself. Rin huffed and continued to glare at Banner who, amusingly now looked quite guilty.

"My Lord is an exemplary strategist! Second to none! Even if my Lord had knowledge of this Magic God's failure, it wouldn't matter. You lowly humans should have all reached the conclusion that it was obviously designed to fail!" Jaken, ever Sesshomaru's supporter, praised. Loki dared not say anything against the 'second to none' statement. Loki knew he was more experienced than Sesshomaru and better for it.

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'The Other found and propositioned me. He told me he could restore me, for a price. Like a marionette I danced. I wanted to remember who I was, what exactly happened to me….because I was suddenly so confused, so desperate, and so angry.'

'With the Other's guidance, my mind reformed, I rediscovered my identity, separated out my memories, recognized people, put a timeline to events. Yet, the elation of rediscovering myself was indeed short-lived.'

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The room silenced for a moment, and stilled. Loki couldn't say anything to defend Sesshomaru, they certainly wouldn't have believed him if he had.

"Kermit is right. Pretty Boy, plagiarizing Glow Stick's strategy, or not, would have brought me to the same conclusion. The strategy he explained to us is basically what happened here three years ago. Glow Stick executed a deliberately unsound Op. Pretty Boy just now proved it to us. I'm convinced." Romanoff clipped off. Sesshomaru looked to Loki in mild surprise, ears up. Banner sat back, understanding that Sesshomaru's surprise meant he had no idea what Loki had actually done.

"I can't believe I'm saying this, but I believe him. It makes sense, along with everything else. Even what Tony did with the missile. Loki didn't plan that, but it's the same basic principle as matches the fire attack." Banner admitted and Loki nearly let loose a breath he didn't know he was holding. The Berserker, of all the mortals, harkened to Sesshomaru.

Loki's magic inside him began to spin out of control. It was actually happening! His pulse quickened and a slight sheen of sweat dotted his brow. He was pulling this off! It terrified and excited him at the same time.
'The Other only rebuilt me to coax and manipulate my resent feelings of hatred, resentment, and envy to grow as an infection. I fought it; I did. I knew that my entire existence was not the misery and anger the Other told me it was. I had rich memories, good ones, yet I didn't win that battle.'

He hadn't realistically thought he would get this far, truly. Loki was, first and foremost, a realist and a cynic. There were simply things in this life that did not work out well. Goals that went unachieved, prices that couldn't be paid, beauty that was made to fade, strength that was cowed till it broke.

When he, after two years and some odd months in Asgard's prison, managed to thaw out his mind, restructure it so that it made sense, he thought of the scheme. The scheme to bring Sesshomaru to the present. He had softened Frigga enough to remind Odin of Tenseiga, to bring the sword to the present so he could properly atone.

The fact that Odin had eventually capitulated, and agreed to retrieve the healing blade, and by proxy Sesshomaru, still vexed Loki. Yet, so far, each step of this far fetched, practically unachievable goal of his was almost within his reach.

Loki swallowed, trying to calm himself but it wasn't working. His mind kept cycling back through what happened.

'My magic had been drained completely from the void and the Other saw the opportunity to create the perfect weapon for his Dark Lord. The hatred curved inward, tainting my every possible memory, emotion, and instinct, like a poisoned well. I focused only those warped emotions towards a golden Thunder God, a one-eyed King, a gilded city, blue skinned giants, and a long-lost Demon Lord.'

He could feel Thor's gaze still buzzing on him like a live wire.

Loki’s magic within him bubbled for release like a volatile chemical solution in reaction to it.

'This, however, does not mean that I have any leadership responsibility over this hodgepodge group of mortals. They have their Director Fury and Captain America for that position. Sesshomaru and I will simply provide instruction from the sidelines…if they end up using our advisement at all' Loki reassured himself, knowing the last thing he wanted was to be directly responsible for any actions other than his own.

Loki found himself staring blankly at the Demon Lord, who turned slightly to him, ears lowering. He suspected something was up, Sho had long ago began to sense his magic like he would a Demon's youki.

'I became a patchwork Frankenstein of someone I used to be.'

'I was forced into submission and beaten to kneel before a Dark Lord in order to obtain an infinity stone with which to conquer Midgard. A place I remembered that wronged me by vanishing my
Loki pursed his lips together, still hating his weakness for not being able to fight back against the Other harder.

'Thor has yet to say anything. I can feel his ice blue gaze drilling holes in my skull and I can't look his way. Is there any way he could believe me?' Loki stilled, daring not to face his brother, he knew his brother, and perhaps Sesshomaru could feel his magic sting and spike within him.

"Yeah. Now we just have to convince everyone else on Earth. Which, so won't be a big problem." Stark's voice rang with sarcasm looking Sesshomaru in the eyes, both of them staring at each other with a look that showed a growing respect from Loki's point of view.

'Outdated strategy indeed Stark….' Loki thought, trying to rein in his magic that still twisted within him. His magic laced blood raced through his veins, his absurd idea was actually working and Loki still had to process it. He needed to be alone to calm his magic.

"...Natasha's right. Everything he explained would make sense if you wanted to fail an invasion, and remember Stuttgart? That got everyone's attention, in a way that didn't help Loki or his commanders." Rogers stated woodenly, still processing.

"What I want to know, Fancy Pants, is why someone would purposely fail an invasion attempt? Why go through the trouble?!" Clint's voice sounded confused, asking the one question Loki had hoped no one would ask.

Loki couldn't do anything but stand stock still in horror. He knew what Sesshomaru would say. There were only three reasons someone would purposely fail an invasion.

He wanted to flee from the room, but instead his mind just froze. He kept replaying the reasons why he was even there in the first place.

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'The invasion was an opportunity to carve out a destiny that at the time I thought I wanted. But in reality, it was what the Mad Titan wanted. The Other manipulated me into thinking I desired it as well. And I was none the wiser until I arrived on Midgard, connecting back to Yggdrasil and charging regaining some of my own magic. Things didn't make sense.

'I never wanted to rule this planet, I even promised Sho once that I wouldn't. I realized that the Other put me back together in a way that benefitted him, not necessarily what was actually true. Yet, those warped emotions and those memories still remained, as if icing or glazing over my true self. I still hated Thor three years ago, I still resented everything, I still felt that despair haunt me. But I knew that this destiny was not the right path. It was not mine.'

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Loki's magic levels were going haywire, feeding off his inner turmoil. Green smoke coiled tightly behind his eye sockets.

His blood thinned in his veins, he knew soon Sesshomaru would answer Clint's question. He had to get out of this room. His hands shook and his chest rattled like an aerosol can, he knew Thor,
Sesshomaru and perhaps even Jaken could sense his magic churn but Sesshomaru would not react unless he did something outward, to save him face.

"...I would purposely fail if I desired fortune and the targeted Lord bought my allegiance. More likely, if my superiors were treating me ill, such as refusing to promote me or worse persecuting me into their wishes." Sesshomaru's eyes went wide and he froze, toxin coated his fingers.

Loki then knew Sesshomaru had put all the information together. Loki's whole body started to convulse. Green magic snaked around ankles and steamed out his eyes. His emerald magic wrapped like vines within him. If anyone noticed his magic react around him, he couldn't tell, his vision had narrowed into a tunnel and he couldn't properly focus.

He wanted to lash out and attack, implode, and disappear all at the same time. He hugged his sides tightly, as if to literally hold himself together.

Sesshomaru looked Loki right in his eyes, his gold ones glazed over in disbelief. Time froze. Loki took a step back, throat dry. His face stretched in panic. Sesshomaru's eyes remained wide, his pupils slit, his youki surged around him like a blue whirlpool on the floor. Jaken took Rin away in a rush.

"Persecution." Sesshomaru growled. "This Other, he kept you." Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles, toxin sizzling the floor. Loki had no idea what the other Avengers were thinking, he couldn't take his eyes off Sesshomaru; he commanded his attention.

Also, the magic that smoked from his eyes obscured his peripheral vision. The magic began to turn from green to black.

"I simply couldn't endure. My mind isn't truly my own any longer. It has a new forger, not unlike a broken blade." Loki found his choked voice. Loki knew he would only be what the Other made him into: the Other's broken blade.

'Blast you Clint Barton! I was fooling the lot of you. I had, up till now, tricked you all into thinking I was actually Loki, God of Mischief, not this monster I am now.' Loki experienced a flash of a memory: his own laughter, high and brittle, his saliva and blood spraying into the air. A masked face looking down, eyes vicious. His own skull fractured; his hair ripped out. His fingers broken backwards, his thighs coated in blood.

'I had blocked that time out. I can't have these mortals know about it. I can't face my broth-Thor. Sometimes I curse Sesshomaru being here, Thor looking at me this way, making me remember I didn't used to be this monster, that I was once someone.' Loki's lungs grinded like sand on rusted metal.

"I existed once. I truly did. You know that." Loki gestured to Sesshomaru palm up.

His black magic spiraled out of him and fanned out on the floor, like three roots of a great tree. From his eyes, his magic turned black and twined into six branches on the ceiling. Yggdrasil. Loki heard someone say something, but he knew it wasn't Sesshomaru nor Thor.

Sesshomaru blinked, reining in his youki. Loki's pulse jackhammered in his ears and mind scattered. The past clashed with the present, the torture with the peace, the masked Other with handsome Clint. He was losing it. He couldn't let the mortals see what he truly was. They had to believe him, not think he was some sort of broken mess. A broken blade.

Loki did the only thing he could: he teleported down to substorage room 3-b.
He slumped to the floor where he and Sesshomaru usually slept and violently shook with images of a blue masked face, sharp cerulean wires, potent hostile magic, and vials of his own blood.

His magic grew to fill the storage room like vines would an abandoned building. He could not go back to who he was before the Other had him, before he fell from the Bifrost. He did not know how.

'I can still hear their jeers, the sound of my flesh ripping, the smell of my burnt skin and hair, my own strangled, defiant laughter echoing in the cell. The sight of my failing magic limping against the walls. It's still all there. It still keeps me.' Loki suddenly felt extremely fatigued and drained, he wanted to simply sleep. He then saw the door open, the black vines of magic recoiling from the light.

Who came down surprised him.

"...Brother?" Loki would eviscerate Sesshomaru for this. He would take his own whip and flay him with it. He knew Thor wouldn't come down of his own volition, Sho forced Thor to come...what a waste of time. What an insult!

"Thor, we are not brothers, and as you can see I am in a most uninterested mood." Loki's green eyes flashed in the darkness but his voice held no strength. This was supposed to be his time of triumph, not one of crippling terror.

"I knew not that was how...I was unaware that...I should have thought better of you. I should have looked for reasons for your actions." Thor's voice sounded gravelly as he slowly entered the dark room.

"...it matters not." Loki didn't know what to say. 'That Thor should have seen through my attempt? Seen through my own paper-thin sanity three years ago? Shouldn't have assumed me dead when I let go from the Bifrost? Should have known I didn't care two bits about ruling Midgard?' Loki had long tired of waiting for Thor to notice his plight.

"It matters a great deal! It is of great importance to me! The conditions you were under when you led...and you endured Allfather's punishments voluntarily... I failed you." Loki hadn't heard his voice sound so thick and sticky in a long time. Thor sat on the floor beside him.

"It truly matters not..." Loki just felt tired, he hadn't slept well recently due to his nightmares. Perhaps before the Bifrost he wanted this conversation. Not now. Not anymore.

"Falsehoods! Brothers are supposed to know each other. I feel as if Son of Taisho knows you far better than I, and he ceased to be five hundred years ago. He even stated if you truly wanted Midgard you would have had it. I doubted your desires and intelligence. I even forgot how skilled you are in sparring when you truly mean it." Thor croaked out, his voice not matching his strong, though slumped silhouette. Loki shook his head, eyes heavy, because Thor, as always, was too little, too late.

Loki’s magic flared in stale anger as a green shockwave of magic flung Thor to the other side of the room. Thor didn't even appear phased, all he did was tuck into a tumble and skid to the far wall, eyes on the floor.

"Stay. Back. Thor. I have neither desire nor energy to relieve your precious conscience of its regret. I am on Midgard for two purposes. One, to save our realms; Two, to slaughter the Other. Assuaging your guilt about our false fraternal bond is not one of them. You are my ally. Nothing. More." Loki's voice sounded stronger than he knew he actually was, or felt. He was not responsible
for Thor's feelings, and he wouldn't roll over and just accept a meaningless apology either because it really didn't matter. Thor would get over it. Thor would get over him; he always was resilient.

"I will not leave you alone down here." Thor righted himself against the far wall of the storage room and Loki sighed through his nose, smiling wanly and shaking his head. He had forgotten Thor's stubbornness. When his magic calmed and he rested, he would beat Sesshomaru into the cement for not coming himself.

Loki didn't say anything else as he just leaned against the wall and drifted into a nightmare, which was, just in time, interrupted by a pulsing ice blue glow.

Chapter End Notes

that chapter took a lot out of me! whew.

I'd like to give a special shout out to everyone who is reading this story! Thank you again to: Kyrrhe, Akuma_river, vibs88, Kitty_grell_laureyson, Kumiko, Polished+silver, Catriona695, Kiren201, the_archivist, heavenlycosmos, matchynishi, Gabxluci2796, for your encouraging and wonderful comments!

Also! i have gotten some questions about the pairings, this is my stance right now! the following pairings for the fic will be Clint/Loki and Sesshomaru/Tony.

with maybe some little surprise pairings (squint and you can see them) and some 'blurred line' pairings as well.

I hope you enjoyed this chapter :)

-TL
Sesshomaru and the Shellfish

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Sesshomaru and the Shellfish.

(*(*

It was a wonder Sesshomaru managed to contain himself.

He had sensed that Loki's magic was acting unruly, and he wasn't entirely sure why. He had delivered what he had thought was a sound strategy yet Loki the entire time reverberated with a strange, dark magic he could not place.

Sesshomaru, also, nearly, flashed his youki at the Berserker for daring to imply he would try to claim a strategy he created was Loki's. Didn't any of these ungrateful humans understand he didn't have to do any of this? This was a courtesy for a friend and their realm and these humans dared state that he would demean himself to copy Loki?

What had truly agitated the Demon Lord the most was that even Stark seemed interested to hear his response, and did not even question that he would never with a hint of integrity, attempt such a farce.

He would have thought, that at least Stark, with whom he had the most interaction would see that the Berserker's question was an insult. He was mistaken.

His patience had all but run out, if it had not been for Thor who agreed with Rin and Jaken he would have simply left, taking Rin, Jaken, and if need be Loki as well. He had already proven his honor when he asked Barton if he could reclaim his own by shooting Loki. He should not have to prove it again.

He shouldn't have even needed to prove it in the first place, especially to humans!

Afterwards, he found his simmering anger towards the humans paled when Barton asked his own question.

It was when his emotions, which were typically kept very well hidden and controlled, threatened to boil over and rip his composure apart. He hadn't thought about the question that Barton had posed seriously until now. He had simply thought that Loki had been foolishly convinced that ruling this realm in this time was advantageous and later regretted the decision. Or perhaps Loki had gotten wrapped up in a game of his that had gotten out of control.

He truly had no room to judge if Loki had gotten himself into a mess over ruling this realm. Sesshomaru had found himself five hundred years into the future, and he had little idea what could have changed in between the last time he had seen Loki, and this time.

He hadn't actually thought there was a being that could not only could capture Loki, but also make him do their bidding. Sesshomaru's opinion of these foes changed drastically. These alien foes had to be formidable indeed. He certainly needed to train with Bakusaiga more.

Loki’s reaction, the words he spoke certainly had jarred Barton from his seat. Those words would haunt him as well.
Sesshomaru didn't quite understand what Loki meant that he had existed once, that he was 'reforged'. Sesshomaru knew that once a weapon was reforged, it was no longer quite the same weapon as before. He had done so with Tenseiga, and had seen what had happened with Tessaiga as well. Tenseiga, after being forged into a blade with offensive capabilities was never quite the same even though he had relinquished the abilities to Inuyasha in the end.

However, Tenseiga was still Tenseiga.

Did this Other not just control Loki's mind, but reform it somehow? How did Loki find himself in such a position?

And Barton…the way he jumped and said Loki's name as Loki's magic began to falter and grow into his home realm's own tree, showed this archer showed grave concern, and astonishment. Perhaps Loki's fondness for the archer is not one-sided after all.

But, really, Sesshomaru at the time had not thought about that in the least.

Sesshomaru was furious at himself, and these mysterious, alien foes. He would crush them. He would first make them bend to him, showing their backs. With talons sharp, he'd then cleave downwards, wrenching out their spinal cords with their heads still attached and launch them back at their own fleet, entrails streaming. No being, no entity, dare force dominion upon his pack.

This Titan, Sesshomaru vowed, would fall to the height of his true terror and power. He would flee from his might, and he would cut him down without a shred of mercy.

His red youki threatened to blaze out of control, he needed space from the humans. They could not see his misstep in not thinking that Loki could never be forced to kneel to the order of another. They could not see him lose control, this required delicate care.

Loki needed to gain the trust of the humans without his presence, and convene with his brother.

So, after Jarvis did indeed locate Loki in their room, Sesshomaru suggested Thor go down to check on him, he went to balcony to calm his red, lethal youki poking through Tenseiga's soothing whispers. Stark followed him and he told him he was leaving.

Sesshomaru recalled their brief conversation.

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"You're leaving. Now!?! Loki is downstairs having some sort of PTSD nervous breakdown!" The shocked look on Stark's face struck Sesshomaru as odd. It was almost as if he had concern that Loki needed him. Loki could handle himself, and there were more important matters to take into consideration.

Like how he was a hairsbreadth from his Demon Blood wanting to break free and transform, which he would most certainly not show his true from in front of these humans, who would certainly attempt to attack him out of fear. He'd then probably slay one of them. What an inconvenience that would be.

"Yes. This Sesshomaru has had enough of you and the rest of your… friends’ games. This Sesshomaru needs to go scout and train. Loki will recover." Sesshomaru had enough of this inane prattle. He sought assent from no one and tired greatly of these humans requesting explanations from him.

"Look, if this is about Bruce's question about you…uh copying Loki's strategy it wasn't an insult it
just matched so well... "Sesshomaru’s eyes bled slightly red. How could he see it any other way? These humans clearly saw him as a being of low honor...or..."

Or that he wasn't intelligent enough to create his own strategy. A grave mistake on their part.

Sesshomaru resisted the urge to grab Stark by the throat again by cracking his knuckles that now glowed green.

"...you all doubt this Sesshomaru's integrity and intelligence. A costly slight." Sesshomaru bit out, his usual monotone voice held an edge to it.

"Ok Sailor Moon can you really—" Sesshomaru completely disregarded Stark as he maneuvered around him back to the living room to Rin and Jaken. Stark cut himself off seeing what he was saying fell on deaf ears.

"Rin behave, I will return in three days for you and Jaken." Sesshomaru regarded Rin with a clear eyed stare. Rin nodded resolutely.

"Will we stay here in this fortress with the humans Lord Sesshomaru?" Rin asked, looking around at the others who still remained in the living room.

"Of course we aren't staying with these wretched humans who don't appreciate our Lord's charity! Our Lord assists them in defending their realm and, in return they accuse him of deceit and treachery! These humans will be the death of all of us, even the death of that Magic God!" Jaken shook with anger and Sesshomaru for once didn't admonish him for it.

"Not Uncle Loki!" Rin gasped, putting a hand to her mouth

"Worry not Rin. I will decide on our residence upon my return. Jaken you are responsible for her care." Sesshomaru ordered and Jaken paled but nodded. Stark turned to him almost in alarm.

"So when you return you might just leave?" Sesshomaru almost ignored Stark's question however he instead turned to him, he almost could say his voice had an underlying tone of desperation and shock to it.

Why would it be shocking if he left was beyond his comprehension. He, Jaken and Rin could easily live on their own in this time.

The desperation, perhaps, was that the humans didn't trust Loki if left entirely to his own devices. This Sesshomaru, however, was no one's keeper, especially not Loki's.

"That is a question I did not give my consent to answer." For the first time since saying that particular sentence Sesshomaru’s eyes didn't have a humorous glow to them. His voice cut through the room like a cold draft and with a swish of long silver hair he turned away from the remaining humans

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Stark had continued to protest, stating they weren't a daycare. Sesshomaru informed him that Jaken was almost 400 years old and not a child. He had no time to argue, he had to go. These humans, they had no clue of his true, churning anger, of the rage that surged like high tide in his gut.

He also didn't understand why Stark would think he would assume responsibility of Rin.

Rogers also looked unhappy, so he blandly informed them he would keep his youki at a trackable
level for either Stark's science device or Loki's magic.

It would be easy, he doubted he could temper it to a cloaked level at present anyway. He also wished, if any Demons existed where he aimed to scout, to dare challenge him. Let them fall by his talons, let their blood glisten on the grass.

Right before he departed, he left Tenseiga in their quarters, ordering him to guard the sleeping Loki, even from Thor who stood next to him, darkened in sorrow and shame, aura heavy. Tenseiga flashed in agreement and he was off.

He didn't trust the humans, and for his training he didn't need Tenseiga.

Rin waved goodbye and he informed her he would bring her back a gift and he went off Southwest in great bounding leaps, only Rin and Jaken understanding his clawing need to be free. He ensured the important technical documents were in hand and music device filled with the newest music recommended to him by Polly: A sound track for a film called "Queen of the Damned", Stone Temple Pilots, Prince, and Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Bakusaiga grinded against her sheath, eager to be unleashed.

He could hear no voices in the wind, so he turned on the music, listening to the soundtrack, unleashing his sense of scent to guide him out of the city.

'I watched you change, it's like you never had wings.' Change, by the Deftones played in his device.

The path he took between the sky scrapers immediately he was reminded of the first time he saw Loki unleash his true might, his true darkness.

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He and Loki had been treasure questing in a far distant realm, the first time father had allowed him to do so alone. His father had to remain at home to deal with another tireless territorial dispute. However, he insisted to Sesshomaru to venture forth and learn. His father had no target for assassination for him, unlike a month ago when he sent Loki with him to challenge a pair of Panther Demons.

Sesshomaru decided to accompany Loki, knowing it would not be a dull or insipid waste of time. He had to prove to father he was capable of adapting to new places, and growing his adolescent power.

"Be wary though this canyon. Nidavellir secrets many traps and horrors; one must be always remain vigilant." Loki cautioned and Sesshomaru nodded, he felt many odd energies spiking, and he smelled death and decay growing with each step. The treasure they quested for was apparently a vein of extremely rare and powerful stone called uru. Loki sought to take some to forge special daggers of his own design. He stated it was imperative to forge these daggers, to prove himself.

Sesshomaru knew what he meant, they both questing to prove themselves for various reasons.

Sesshomaru cared not for the metal. He rarely cared for any of bounties Loki searched for. At first, if a bauble or item was intrigued Sesshomaru enough, he brought it back to his father for appraisal, which never met in any approval. So, now he avoided asking for any share in the treasure at all.

He knew the relationship was similar for Loki and his father as well. Though Loki coveted treasure
for his own purpose, he did once witness him show his boon to his father who reacted with
disinterest and patronization. This treasure quest, however, was different and it mattered not to
Sesshomaru why. Surely Loki’s father will cease to be so blind to Loki’s abilities soon.

Loki strode ahead, sure in each step, though Sesshomaru could smell that he was nervous. He
ebbed out his blue youki, to show any would be attacker just whom with they were dealing. He
heard the slight movement to the right but smelled nothing. Sesshomaru's sharp eyes darted to the
side, just not fast enough.

He dodged the first strike, just not the second.

Sesshomaru felt his bones crunch inward as he was slammed against the canyon wall by a great
stone tail. Stones tumbled down the cliff side, one striking him on the right side of his head. His
eyes wide, pupils and irises mere dots, gazed unfocused as blood was forced up and out of his
lungs and into the air as a fine spray.

A great stone dragon, camouflaged into the canyon wall roared and reared its short neck into the
air. The dragon barely had any scent at all. Sesshomaru assessed his damage, it was nothing he
couldn't heal, though his left arm was pinned under the dragon's vicelike tail and his armor
shattered. His ribs had buckled inward, and he could tell his organs were displaced and flattened.

He also couldn't breathe, a potential problem.

Sesshomaru flared his red youki out, gritting his fangs. He anticipated the tail to fling back,
rebuffed by his youki, yet it held strong and sure. He collected, compressed, and pushed it forward
again to no avail, it just flashed back at him.

Changing tactics, he lengthened his talons as long as he could, bringing them down upon the stone
tail of the dragon, awaiting the hiss and bubbling of his toxin. It did not come. The toxin produced
no effect on the hide of this dragon. Sesshomaru fought the panic brought on by his lungs crushing
in; he would not lose his calm. He struck, and struck and struck again at the scales, hand bleeding,
markings running jagged, he didn't have enough room to transform!

He then saw, in his periphery, a spiking obsidian mass. Loki.

The shining black magic spiraled out of the God like a lotus blossom and pummeled the dragon
back. The petals spun and sliced the dragon's vulnerable underside, splashing a graphite scented
blood across the canyon floor. The dragon roared, launching a massive column of grey flame
against the surging black magic.

Sesshomaru summoned his whip, his thoughts sloughing through his mind. He had to assist. He
flung the whip long, its span just barely reaching the underside of the dragon's heavy tail.

He heard a sizzle, but the tail pushed back into him, he felt his spine fracture and then break, he
lost all feeling in his legs. He looped his whip around for another pass, again finding purchase
against the tail. Darkness dimmed the edges of his vision; he had to hold out but his arm refused to
move as fast as he ordered it to.

"I am Loki, Prince of Asgard you foul beast. You will obey me and release him!" Sesshomaru heard
the words, but in no realm had he ever heard Loki's voice that menacing. Loki's black and green
magic fired upwards like a beacon it darkened the sky. Sesshomaru struggled, but his whip began
to fade. The dragon roared, its spade shaped fangs glinting in the magic and it swept its great
clawed hand out at the God.
The hand immediately ricocheted back, a long thorn of magic impaled its palm. From the beacon of magic, more thorns of magic struck forth, skewering the underbelly of the giant lizard. Sesshomaru smirked weakly, his vision closing as his hand dropped to his side limply. Foolish monster to try to take them on.

It shrieked and writhed in pain as the lances carved sideways and eviscerated it. Its innards spilling free of its engorged gut, plopping onto the stone, putrid smelling and steaming.

The dragon fell with a dense, cumbersome thud, sending a tremor through the canyon floor not unlike an earthquake. The tail finally flopped, as if the dragon's death wish was to keep Sesshomaru in place as long as possible.

"Sho!" Sesshomaru heard his name as he slid down the craggy stone wall into a crumpled heap at the base, eyes struggling to stay open and focus. He choked on his own blood, not air. He must look a sight. He had to summon his healing youki before he lost consciousness! Sesshomaru focused finally, noticing a pale young man with shoulder length black hair and wholly black eyes in front of him. Strange.

It was then he felt air flood his mouth like a great gust, forcing down his windpipe and inflating his collapsed lungs. That. Hurt.

Sesshomaru gasped, immediately his Demonic instincts took over and his blue youki rushed around him like a tingling current, slowly healing his internal injuries first.

He coughed and sputtered, his lungs beginning to regain their shape, he felt various organs shift back into place, followed by his ribs, lastly his spine then his head. His body shook with weakness, at least he could feel his legs now. He had not known for how long he was sprawled out on the canyon floor like some newborn pup.

Loki. Oh yes. The treasure quest. He forced himself up to stand, his legs finding fresh blood pumping through them. He stood alone, Loki nowhere in sight, Sesshomaru's ears lowered.

Had Loki abandoned him to go forward with the quest? He would not blame him if he did; he miscalculated and imperiled himself and the mission. A costly mistake which also endangered the Mischief God. Sesshomaru's chest clenched which had nothing to do with a previous energy, and everything to do with shame.

Sesshomaru had never had anyone come to his rescue before. He cracked his knuckles awkwardly and sniffed the air smelling the fragrant pine scent of Loki nearby. He set out to settle a debt; surely he could find some of this fabled uru stone and demand Totosai to craft some daggers with it.

"I should not have brought you here, I apologize. My greed for a new weapon had blinded me to the reality of this place." Sesshomaru's ears pricked up, hearing Loki's voice on the other side of the dragon's corpse. He deftly jumped over it. Loki seated, next to a few stones, carved runes into the dead dragon's belly with his green magic.

"This Sesshomaru has never been led by any being. I go where I please, and do as I please."

"You could have easily perished here! This dragon ate some of the uru I quested for! It turned his outer scales impervious to not only almost all weapons and venoms but also allowed them to absorb magic! It is sheer good fortune his underbelly had not succumb to the same enhancement
otherwise we would not have been able to defeat it." Loki yelled, voice rising, pointing at the stones on the ground next to him. Sesshomaru narrowed his gaze, he would not be patronized.

"...you. You defeated it. This Sesshomaru owes you a debt. You may request something of equivalent value from this Sesshomaru." Sesshomaru squared his shoulders, pride splintered. He smelled the incensed anger flowing from Loki. He vowed this would not happen again, he would force the God to allow him to reclaim his pride. Sesshomaru understood he was a liability, he endangered his friend's life with his own carelessness.

Friend. Sesshomaru's ears lifted, he had never thought that before.

"It was my fault you were here in the first place! You deaf dog!" Loki shouted, flinging his arms out to the side. They were at an impasse. Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow, deaf was he?

"You are sure to make me deaf with your shouting." Sesshomaru face stoic, voice smirking. Sesshomaru bent down to pick up one of the surprisingly light uru stones.

"And you render me bloodless from cardiac arrest!" Loki studied Sesshomaru who's eyes had lit up and surprisingly shoved one of the stones into Loki's chest. Loki blinked as the stone glowed a stunning red black.

"Quest complete. This Sesshomaru successfully flushed the beast out of hiding for your disposal and acquisition of the treasure." Sesshomaru allowed a quick gleam of a smile slice across his face. Success and victory.

Loki laughed, long and hard, green sparks shooting from his fingers, absorbing into the uru and out into the sky.

"Oh yes, while that was the outcome of the events, I hesitate to claim those were your exact intentions. Let's return to Asgard." Loki, still bent over from laughter, swirled his teleportation magic ring around them.

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Sesshomaru's rage eventually waned as he scouted deep into green mountains, wide fields, salty beaches, and other human cities. One city had a tall white spire and a shallow pool to reflect it, but it did not have the building he saw in his scry. Bakusaiga insisted he must find his mother's tomb, yet another aim for this scouting trip.

Scry. Another reason for his scout was to train with Bakusaiga to get more powerful as a weapon and to control the scry better. He could not allow another moment of vulnerability like the first scry. Yet, he wanted to attempt it again, albeit being in full control. He had to understand precisely what had occurred. Bakusaiga? His daughter?

Could that infernal Storm God actually be right about something?!

He still encountered no Demons. Which disappointed him not only because he ached for a fight, but it further cemented his belief that the entirety of his kind was gone.

He bounded further South, finding a long, narrow island with a black and white tower that revolved with light. This island, despite the revolving light tower, had the best view of the stars he had seen since coming to this realm. He would take Rin and Jaken here.

Again, no sign of the flat, salty, white land. So he continued on, making note of all human military outposts he smelled along the way. He eventually found a great tiered waterfall to practice his
katas in, getting better control and confidence with Bakusaiga. She had become quite unruly since the magic gate, but more powerful. The next time he scryed, he would be successful. He had a plan.

He enjoyed the solitude, but he had become unaccustomed to it, and looked behind him a few times, almost thinking he would see Jaken or hear Rin. He wasn't sure when the silence became unusual, except the 'hear ain'ts' also reminded him of a specific debt he owed to a certain human.

The second night he overheard from a great distance from some wandering humans there was a city on the coast with delicious human edible goods. He also picked up on the word crabs.

Ah, yes. A good gift for Rin, she adored the shellfish.

He ventured there, as far as human metropolises went, Sesshomaru appreciated this one's beauty. It had large gnarled, budding trees, a tall clock tower, buildings old and short, and lights that shone warm and inviting.

He waited for nightfall before he took off his boots, fur, armor, and haori to wade out into the ocean to gather some crabs for Rin. He procured a discarded bucket and gathered a few crabs then hesitated. A rarity.

His initial anger and wrath had subsided and it allowed him to gain a clear-minded, objective insight into his and Loki's situation.

'Perhaps the humans had a right to have reservations on the ethics of my war assembly. Loki obviously had not long ago been their enemy, and humans in general, tended to hold grudges and distrust Demons. In particular, humans from this time did question everything. Even their commander Fury questioned Loki's shape shift and even I saw how Loki was identical to myself.' Sesshomaru smelled and heard more crabs beneath the surf. He debated.

'Loki seemed to believe we need the humans' help to defeat these alien foes. Though by no means am I forced to stay with Stark in his fortress, it would be logical to reside in the tower to observe the humans' behavior' Sesshomaru noted the crabs circled him, perhaps the animals of this time remembered Demons at an instinctual level.

'I also doubt Storm God will allow his brother to leave his side after seeing his confession. I will not abide Thor following Loki and I about this time like a petulant pup. Storm God in the tower is easily distracted by those humans and their games. Especially that game on their device called a television.' Sesshomaru's ears rose, under the water the crabs began to act as if they were going to attack him.

'If Storm God were to travel with Loki, Rin, Jaken and I, it would eventually spark a fight. I'd rather not have to kill Loki's brother, Rin does like him.' Sesshomaru flared his youki out faintly and the crabs stood down.

Sesshomaru sighed through his nose while standing in the ocean, the cool waves lapped up to his knees. He also had a debt to repay to Stark.

As quick as Thor's lightning, the Demon Lord gathered the circling crabs in the large bucket and made his way back to the Big Apple.

Along the way North, he put down the bucket and absconded down a beach near what he could discern was a large naval base. He found he enjoyed sand between his toes. He would inquire about the enormous naval stronghold; it could easily be a target for their approaching foes.
He also found he enjoyed the four musical artists Polly have him. Nirvana remained his favorite. He understood what Polly meant when she stated "you sometimes need some rage music" in reference to the Queen of the Damned soundtrack. The Stone Temple Pilots were also quite favorable, though inspired no rage.

He supposed his new list, in order of preference would be Nirvana, Stone Temple Pilots, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Prince, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Queen of the Damned, then The Counting Crows.

Sesshomaru wondered, absently, what Stark would think of his musical preferences.

Exhausting his wrath is what mattered, which was achieved. He would assist in defending this realm, but more importantly, regaining Loki's honor and his own goal of becoming the strongest he could be. This 'Mad Titan' Thanos would kneel before him.

Exhausting his wrath is what mattered, which was achieved. He would assist in defending this realm, but more importantly, regaining Loki's honor and his own goal of becoming the strongest he could be. This 'Mad Titan' Thanos would kneel before him.

And if that meant suffering the presence of these humans, so be it. Sesshomaru was not one to cave to difficulties easily.

Slipping into the tower through the roof access, he made his way to the kitchen.

With a dump of a bucket, he deposited the angry crabs in the sink, they clucked and scrabbled. He shot them with a burst of youki to calm them and poured water and salt over them.

Salt. The white land. He searched and smelled for his mother and salt but only sensed the vast ocean. He would find his mother's tomb. His mother would have answers and even more importantly the Meido Stone father entrusted her with.

He needed to procure the Stone, it would now be his responsibility though he wanted nothing to do with it. He never particularly enjoyed their meetings, she never bothered with him much throughout his life and she irked him.

Sesshomaru understood his mother never prioritized him, his father, nor his father's Lands, but her haughty attitude in addition to her apathy soured his attitude towards her.

"Welcome back Sailor Moon." His ears pricked up and he saw Stark silhouetted in the doorway. He didn't necessarily catch Sesshomaru by surprise, rather, he was surprised at himself for relaxing his ears that it Stark who greeted him, and not another.

Sesshomaru nodded in return, he still had no idea why he kept calling him a sailor. He never much favored sea-going vessels, the moon part was obvious.

"Whatcha got there?" Sesshomaru smelled the human spirits of scotch on Stark. Sesshomaru turned and gestured to the sink, now active with hissing and clicking crabs.

Sesshomaru debated playing the question game, but Stark was acting placidly enough, for once, and he was tired.

"Twenty-four crabs." Sesshomaru replied as Stark made his way over to him, his body moving more fluidly than usual. His hair looked unkempt and his expressive mouth quirked up into a wry smirk. Sesshomaru had come to anticipate Stark's expressions he conveyed by even doing even the
smallest actions. He also liked his facial hair, it was not common in his time and it always intrigued him.

"Christ you're weird." Stark looked into the sink, scratching the back of his head. Sesshomaru's ears lowered defensively. So much for him acting placidly.

"Rin enjoys them." Sesshomaru explained lowly, he started doing too much explaining to the humans, especially to Stark.

Stark huffed and crossed his arms as if not believing his explanation. Stark wasn't the typically handsome human, such as Bedclothes, that Demonesses were notoriously attracted to, he was a different sort of striking.

"Didja get em in Charleston? The city you were in that has those trees, bad southern accents, and old buildings." Stark's voice slurred, Sesshomaru looked at him, noting Stark was watching him intently with dark, glazed eyes, as if that wasn't the question he really wanted to ask.

So they did monitor his movements.

"...I am going to retire." Sesshomaru felt slightly uncomfortable with Stark staring at him like he was a puzzle to be solved, especially indecently dressed in nothing but short pants again. Sesshomaru couldn't read him, especially when inebriated.

Stark grabbed his wrist in an impulse, his hand was calloused and made his skin feel afire. Sesshomaru didn't shake his hand off, his instincts would disapprove if he had.

"Are you sticking around? Cuz we needta know. I want to know." He heard Stark ask, hand still on his wrist.

Stark wanted to know? He knew no strife had occurred while he was gone, his barrier would have alerted him. Clearly they cohabited with Loki well. His presence was unnecessary. Why did Stark care if he stayed?

Sesshomaru looked back at him, noting his strong jaw, straight eyebrows and broad shoulders. Though the man was shorter than himself, he held himself tall. Sesshomaru, upon further analysis, decided he would grant Stark another chance to understand his greatness. The human was far too… enthralling to write off.

"Yes." Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes as he felt Stark's fingers graze over his magenta wrist marking, tracing it. This drunk human called him weird?

"Good. You're not sleeping in that stupid storage room anymore. We got a spare room up here, with like, actual furniture." Stark gestured with his other hand down hallway.

Good?

Sesshomaru realized he was simply letting this human hold him. He had never allowed anyone to engage him like this. Ever.

"...you can release this Sesshomaru." Stark balked, as if he didn't realize he was holding him, and released his wrist. His skin memorized the traces his thumb made, as if missing his touch. He needed sleep.

"Yeah, well goodnight." Stark turned to walk away, Sesshomaru's ears lowered, Stark's posture had slumped just a little.
"Indeed." Sesshomaru responded rarely and turned to go down the elevator to his room, head spinning with the bizarre encounter.

Why exactly had he allowed that with Stark? Why did his youki react that way to his touch on his markings? His youki wished for it again and Sesshomaru had no clear idea why. Stark was a useful human, intelligent, attractive, resourceful, and somewhat amusing.

But a human.

'Humans, in my own time, were filthy, disgusting, dimwitted creatures. The humans from this time, however, possess great ingenuity. While I have spotted many overweight and undesirable humans in this realm, I have also encountered many attractive, intelligent ones. Such as that Jason Sisson, whom insisted I meet him at some juncture to drink human spirits. And Stark…Stark is…' The elevator doors opened and immediately he was thrown harshly against the back of the elevator, head ringing.

Loki had recovered.

Sesshomaru was in no mood for a spar, nor to be honest the best condition. He saw the rage in Loki's green eyes and blocked and dodged his flurry of kicks and punches barely. This was unexpected. The elevator walls were dented and punctured through from Loki's fury. Sesshomaru winced as one magicked fist connected with his kidney.

"How dare you flee! Are you that disgusted by my weaknesses?! You have little idea what happened to me! How dare you judge me so!" Loki flew off the handle and Sesshomaru cracked his talons and corroded the now closed elevator door to escape. He darted through the corroded opening only for Loki to gracefully bend through as well in pursuit.

'What in the Four Lands is he speaking about?' Sesshomaru arced out of the way of a magic bolt that scorched the wall of the hallway, summoning his whip he began to counter the incensed Loki. Loki intercepted his own whip with magic vines, knocking the toxin whip back before it could hit Loki.

Loki summoned a special dagger, one that he had not used in their previous spars for a good reason.

"This Sesshomaru does not flee. Lok -" Sesshomaru was cut off by a dagger flying and slicing deep into his shoulder. Sesshomaru growled knowing the dagger was laced with a magical poison. The poison raced and burned down his arm and through his chest. Sesshomaru gritted his fangs. For a normal Demon or Half-Demon, it could cause death just like his toxin.

Loki's poison, however, on him, just burned his blood and caused him to heal at a sluggish rate, zapping his body of his youki, and youki producing capabilities.

"Don't lie to me. You couldn't face me! You sent Thor to deal with me. Do you regret our friendship so?! Do you see me as that beneath you?!” Loki's black magic danced, filling the hallway in thick, pine fragrant vines and thorns.

Sesshomaru, again, had no idea what caused Loki to become so illogical. He knew Sesshomaru did not lie. Did he not approve of Tenseiga's presence? The proximity barrier alerted him to when his allied Demons, including Tenseiga and Bakusaiga, were in danger. If Loki had been in peril, he would have known through Jaken's presence but Tenseiga would have also aided him if he befell an ambush before he could return to the Tower.
Loki's magic thorns turned to spiked mines, like seed pods from the sweetgum tree. They vibrated with unstable, sparkling black energy. Sesshomaru knew he didn't have sufficient youki reserves, especially now due to the poison, to counter it without Bakusaiga, which was not an option. She would certainly decimate everything, and aim to kill Loki.

He could hear her scream to be unsheathed. No, he could not risk it, even though he could feel that Jaken certainly had Tenseiga. Sesshomaru knew Loki was prone to emotional outbursts. he would not slay Loki or gravely wound him without sorting this out.

"This Sesshomaru doesn't li-" a chain reaction of exploding spiked mines exploded and the thorns rocketed in all directions. He threw up a youki wall to slow most of them down and rebounded off the walls, floor and ceiling to dodge the rest, however he wasn't fast enough.

One sparkling black spike got him right beneath the right ribs, the other his right knee. He landed heavily on his left leg, though still standing. His body singed due to the magic and it rose off him as black steam. His youki began to burn inside him, something deep began to resonate. Loki was a threat.

However, he felt sluggish and his vision blurred slightly from the poison. He was cornered, this was not ideal. Tenseiga was most likely not close enough to command, and he wanted Tenseiga to stay by Rin's and Jaken's side if indeed Loki had truly become mindless with rage.

"I'll remind you how strong I am. How capable I am." Loki looked positively incandescent, his eyes began to bleed black. Sesshomaru was beyond perplexed, he had only seen Loki's eyes that shade of onyx once before. The uru stone quest. Sesshomaru, now, was quite irritated and he felt his talons lengthen, much longer than he usually kept them.

He rose to Loki's challenge.

Loki threw his hands out, and Sesshomaru half let his hands be bound by magic, half didn't feel like struggling. He needed to lure Loki in closer to get a handle on the situation, to be in range of his whip and possibly tear him to shreds. No. Not that. The magic blistered his wrists and the stench of his burned flesh began to fill the air. His wrist's markings on the wrist Stark had touched not minutes before turned from magenta to red.

His youki rebelled, an attempt to placate Loki backfired as his markings began to morph and his eyes bled red at the corners. He had to defeat the threat at all costs. He had to protect what was his. His possessions were in peril, and he would shred Loki apart if he did not submit.

Loki ratcheted up his black magic, producing more spiked, sweetgum tree bombs. His eyes were black slashes of ruthlessness across his face.

Sesshomaru's eyes bled fully red, his talons already were the length of daggers, his mouth crooked up into a sinister smile, all his teeth became sharp as knives. He unleashed an invisible wave of Killing Intent straight at Loki, he was ready to slaughter. He didn't know if Loki felt the bone chilling, gut emptying horror of his Killing Intent, or if Loki's immense, ballooning black magic protected him from it because at that moment his bloodlust was interrupted.

Bakusaiga pulsed.

He then heard a mechanical click.

"You got both your hands full, Loki. I can put a bullet in the back of your skull. Do the math and let Pretty Boy go." Sesshomaru blinked the red from his eyes and his markings thinned. Sesshomaru's
teeth returned to normal and his talons slimmed and shrunk back down to an appropriate length.

Romanoff. She was armed, dressed in bedclothes and did not look happy. She was not bluffing.

'What was...what was that? I have never lost his composure like that before...no wait. I have. Loki and the glade, with the Aesir. It was very similar to what I felt back then. My pack was threatened just now. No one was permitted to endanger my pack, not even someone within it. Yet, Rin and Jaken did have Tenseiga...they were most likely safe, so why did my demon blood react that way?' Sesshomaru straightened, he had not even realized he had hunched over into a launching position for an attack.

Loki's magic wavered and disappeared then he blinked the black out of his eyes. Sesshomaru kept a stoic gaze as he began to walk, with a mild limp towards Loki, inwardly shaking from adrenaline and his own youki. He looked to Romanoff, her voice sounded steady, and she didn't shake, but her pupils were pinpricks.

She had succumbed to some of his Killing Intent. Perhaps that is why she took the action she did. He did not miss her clinical assessment of him, he was quite fine, wounded, but in terms of mental status he was clear.

"Impeccable timing as always miss Romanoff." Loki turned and walked into the substorage room 3-b. Sesshomaru barely quirked an eyebrow. Loki had most likely held in those emotions since he had departed. He knew that Loki, when he did not release his emotions in a healthy way, collected them, and his magic would somewhat take over.

Not unlike his own Demon Blood.

Pause.

"Lover's quarrel?" Romanoff tried at humor and put her gun away. Sesshomaru exhaled through his nose. Her eyes were back to a human's typical pupil size. Sesshomaru wondered absently which among Thor, Loki, or himself the humans would most dislike engaging in battle.

"...we supposedly have much to discuss." Sesshomaru replied, with humor, to assuage Romanoff's lingering fears he was about to tear something, or someone apart. He then attempted to heal his wounds and mend his clothes but it failed. His youki jittered inside him still, his left wrists' markings were still an odd shade of crimson.

Bakusaiga rattled unhappily.

"I'd say so. You did just take off after he had a panic attack and breakdown. I don't know what you expected. Try to work out your issues without bringing tower down this time." Romanoff crossed her arms, seemingly convinced he and Loki were of sound mind. "Also see if you can get Glow Stick in there to fix the elevator door you melted." Sesshomaru glanced to the elevator and it was mechanically still trying to close a mangled door.

And in a haze of green the door repaired, along with the elevator walls.

"Thanks Glow Stick! Y'all kiss and make up, we need a stable Sesshoki." Romanoff stepped into the elevator and Sesshomaru quirked his head to the side attempting to figure out how she got down to this level without it.

Mysterious woman.

Sesshomaru wondered since when the humans and Thor assumed their relationship was beyond
platonic. It wasn't he who Loki placed that incredibly strong, and intricate protection spell on, but Barton.

He entered the room and was unsurprised to see a soundly sleeping Rin and Jaken tangled in his pelt he had left for them, Tenseiga glowed in Jaken's arms. They always slept too soundly. Loki sat on the tall crate tower Sesshomaru usually preferred. He joined him.

"This Sesshomaru left not due to any perceived disgust or condescension towards you." He began, looking to an unusually silent Loki. Loki's eyes were darting about and his hands shook. Sesshomaru confirmed his magic didn't burn him out too much.

"You left me in a tower filled with mortals who used to be my enemies and a clueless Thor after I revealed…that particular confession to them. You deserved it." Loki's words held an edge of dark humor.

"Storm God and his friends needed to establish trust with you without this Sesshomaru present." Sesshomaru articulated and Loki snorted, not really buying it. Sesshomaru inwardly growled, had he had known Loki would be this…jarred by his departure he would have simply done away with his fury by leveling a nearby mountain and saved his scouting for later.

Loki, as valuable as a friend as he was, could be quite puzzling with his emotions. Perhaps relaying his emotions to Loki would make him understand his decision.

"...I also felt great ire towards the humans and my own lack of insight into your actions. It was not productive. I left you Tenseiga. I went scouting. I returned with twenty-four crabs." Sesshomaru fumbled, speaking of emotions did not come naturally to him. Loki looked to him, his eyebrows slanting in dubiousness and his lips tugged into a ridiculous grin.

"You have the oddest way of apologizing. Crabs?!!" Loki laughed softly. Sesshomaru quirked his eyebrow. Apologize? This Sesshomaru? Perfect, this…Mischief God went and twisted his words. He refused to even address it.

"...Rin prefers them. Stark also mentioned it was peculiar. He physically engaged this Sesshomaru in the cooking nook." Sesshomaru explained, yet again. Loki looked to him in epiphany. Loki scanned him as if he would his magic runes and Sesshomaru had no idea what he was looking for. It oddly felt like when Stark regarded him.

"Ah, so that explains it." Loki said cryptically. Sesshomaru's ears flattened and eyebrows furrowed. Sesshomaru didn't know what he meant by that. He refused to make Loki expound, because he knew Loki purposefully baited him. Whatever Loki meant by it, would be revealed in due time.

"Get some sleep, you look worse than when you fought those Panther Demons." Loki shoved him slightly, Sesshomaru allowed it, knowing it was Loki's way of somewhat recognizing and respecting the level of patience and mercy Sesshomaru allowed him. In a way, though Sesshomaru now was completely spent, it was informative to know that if he ever found himself backed into another literal corner, his Demon Blood could be counted on. However, that was not necessarily a good thing, he did not wish for Loki's death, Loki was one of his pack.

Sesshomaru turned to face him once more.

"It was an error on this Sesshomaru's part to misunderstand you." Sesshomaru drilled. He had to ensure Loki comprehended that Sesshomaru, in no realm, wished to miscalculate his friend like that again. He should have been more astute.
"...it wasn't so much that methinks, as much as you had too much faith in my abilities to not be confined against my will." Loki smiled softly. "Which, is refreshing to constant underestimation, of which I am used to. I should not have doubted your opinion of me. The dagger was overkill." Loki shrugged and Sesshomaru remained silent.

Pause.

"They refer to us as 'Sesshoki'." Sesshomaru murmured, thinking of Romanoff and his Killing Intent.

"Of that I am quite aware. They find our friendship one that may not be platonic. Most likely due to the fact we do not attract much in the way of friendly bonds." Loki sighed heavily and Sesshomaru bounded off the crate without his usual grace. He would have to heal his leg first when his youki returned. Loki followed and they sat beside each other.

"Goodnight 'Sho." Loki's voice almost sounded like an apology and a taunt mixed together.

"...do not think you are above reproach Trickster...what was it? Kiki, that one Phoenix demoness called you?" That earned Sesshomaru a death glare as they slept against each other sitting up against crates in the dead of night.

At least until early in the morning, he awoke quietly and touched Bakusaiga's hilt with a right hand. Immediately he heard Bakusaiga sing, and his senses melded once more. Again, the darkness he could taste, his senses creating the great pool of endless, viscous, glass-smooth Demon blood. He stepped down again into the warm, entrancing pool, tasting its iron tang with his feet.

He repeated the steps he did as on the helipad, waiting for the blood to reach chest level, his silver hair webbing out behind him like a veil. He kicked up, only instead of submerging, the golden eyes appeared above him. Bakusaiga.

She rippled above him until eventually solidifying into the Rin-sized form he now knew well. It was if he always knew this was Bakusaiga and had to be reminded.

"Father, you are early. You have not found Grandmother yet, and even worse you let that depressed magic user wound you! You should have wielded me! I would have shown him his place. Instead you almost allowed your….nevermind. Why are you here Father?" Bakusaiga's wide gold eyes flamed and her small fist swirled with green youki. Her white twin tailed hair bristled outward like wings. Sesshomaru did not understand why she hesitated on the last sentence, but he would not be baited into asking.

He had important business.

"I need to scry. I seek someone." Sesshomaru's voice echoed out from the walls, Bakusaiga tilted her head to the side, ears lowering. It was then Tenseiga appeared, face tight, not warm and friendly like before. He almost looked disapproving, and a touch afraid.

"Father, we need to find Grandmother, I cannot guide you to any path until we do. She holds my map of the Astral Plane." Bakusaiga admitted, crossing her small arms, face scrunched as if unwilling to admit such a weakness.

"My Lord, we understand you have been placed in a precarious position, and with a new gift, but patience must be exercised here." Tenseiga sounded tired, his triangle ears were flat against his head, imploring his Lord to listen. He greatly resembled Loki. His mouth was Loki's so was his nose and the shape of his eyes.
Yet, those ears reminded him of Inuyasha.

"This requires immediate action." Sesshomaru contended and Tenseiga let loose a long, heavy sigh. He slumped, quite unlike his demeanor so far, as if a great weight suddenly crushed him.

Bakusaiga put her hands on her hips, wide child-like eyes boring into Sesshomaru's. She stood for a long moment, lips pursed, cheeks flushed in irritation.

"Fine. I am the strongest weapon in existence after all. I can put you on the Astral Plane, but I cannot guide you. Whatever you see, whatever sees you, it's something I cannot aid in until I hold the map. Finding Grandmother was easy because she wanted to be found by you, she guided us. Don't say I didn't warn you, Father." Bakusaiga lifted her arms above her head, the blood from the pool collecting and compressed into a tight sphere above her head. He stood in air.

Tenseiga, despaired, faded slowly away, shoulders slumped as Bakusaiga glowed briefly green

"All astral bodies, heed my command! I am the dominant Bakusaiga, most majestic weapon in existence! Grant my equally great wielder the object of his scry!" Bakusaiga's voice rang out like a gong and all the sudden the blood rushed out of the sphere. Bakusaiga then shot down like a comet, holding onto Sesshomaru's left arm, transforming into her sword form.

She vanished in an instant. The pool reformed in front of him.

Sesshomaru made a horrifying mistake.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for your input, your comments make my day! Any constructive criticisms or opinions are welcome! :)

-TL
Tony woke up to a sizeable hangover. He vaguely remembered tossing back a good portion of a bottle of scotch after his prototype proximity barrier failed. Even Bruce shook his head when it didn't work. Something was off with the displacement system.

He also wanted to be good and drunk before Sailor Moon came back, which he could tell would be around late that night based on his speed and trajectory.

The past three days everyone took by themselves, all coming and going because what happened at the Doomsday meeting took a lot of processing.

The Avengers were on board, they just now had to convince, well everyone else. Fun.

He, Bruce, Steve, and Nat had a good time taking bets on 'Where in the world Sesshomaru San Diego' would go next. Bruce won most of the time, which impressed Natasha, which was hard to do. No one knew how Bruce knew that Sesshomaru would go to Bee Cove Falls, South Carolina. Natasha did correctly guess Cape Hatteras. Steve correctly guessed Norfolk. No one guessed Charleston, South Carolina.

He did wonder how Loki would have done if he had participated, but the only interacted with Clint and Thor. Everyone saw him of course, but he never said anything. Which wasn't surprising, he also never walked around without Sailor Moon's sword, N*sync.

Tony wasn't sure what to make of that, Sesshomaru didn't look like the type to share.

Tony had originally expected Doomsday night to be a huge arduous, pain the ass argument over Sailor Moon strategizing a séance, an animal sacrifice, and pentagrams. Yet, he didn't even mention firing heads out of catapults of people he decapitated personally. His strategy, eerily, mirrored Loki's, just instead of a hole in a city wall, a space portal, and instead of a fire attack, a nuclear warhead.

To say that Tony was impressed, was a considerable understatement. This guy was for real.

And then of course they royally pissed off the prissy Demon. Man could that guy take things personally, and in the worst possible way.

Didn't he get Bruce didn't mean it as an insult, but if anything it was a compliment? His version was so spot on that Bruce thought it could have been copied?

Really, Sailor Moon was way too touchy.

Tony remembered the conversations he had with Bruce about the iridium on the helicarrier three years ago and that once he obtained it from Stuttgart he could make the portal as large as he could.

He also recalled how he told Loki that pissing off the Avengers was a bad plan. A terrible plan to
succeed with an invasion, but a perfect plan to fail one.

He was also right about Loki being a diva. No one had realized that the whole thing was a play, and they were actors all performing to Loki's script, dancing to his beat. It angered and impressed him. Loki was smart. Almost too smart.

Bruce, however, was right about him being bag-full-of-cats crazy. Loki lost everything, but as they say the show must go on.

And it wasn't like SHIELD wasn't in the wrong. They were the ones who tinkered with the tesseract. Fury wanted to weaponize it. Thor was probably right, if it wasn't Loki who came for the disco cube, it would have been someone else.

'That didn't mean that SHIELD was right about weaponizing the tesseract. No one knows it's capabilities, not even me nor Bruce. Nuclear deterrents aren't the answer here. We need to be smart. We need defense. We need specialized tactical weapons specialized for our enemy.' Tony thrashed under his sheets trying to get comfortable again.

Which, is another reason Loki brought Sailor Moon to the 21st century. He was their literal secret weapon. Just as importantly he was a weapon SHIELD couldn't point and pull the trigger on.

Oh. Yeah.. SHIELD.

Of course they had to let SHIELD know about Reindeer Games and his bestie Sailor Moon. At first on doomsday night Tony figured the Avengers would have to come to some sort of consensus on what to do with Reindeer Games.

Executing him was off the table. Not only because Point Break would bludgeon them and then Sailor Moon would use their bones as toothpicks, but if Loki knew the enemy, they would need his knowledge of Thanos, the Other, their ships, and what other Power Ranger putties they had to worry about.

Tony had been cycling his mind between either creating some sort of containment field for Loki, or just sending him to some sort of SHIELD black site. But it sure sounded like if Azkaban on Asgard couldn't hold him, SHIELD couldn't. And if Tony couldn't get his proximity barrier to expand correctly, there'd be a big delay in creating a whole magic-negating containment field.

Yet, the whole issue on: 'What to do with the super villain who just decided to flip sides and buck his superiors' was moot as soon as Sesshomaru answered Clint's question.

Tony had felt the pressure drop from Thor, and the temperature drop from the Demon Lord instantaneously. Tony knew. He knew exactly what happened. Because the exact same thing happened to him in Afghanistan. Tony sat straight as a board as Sesshomaru dripped his toxin onto his floor, and black and green smoke came out from behind Loki's eyes and ankles.

Loki stood broken, panicked, and on the verge of losing it, and he understood why. The one person he thought he couldn't really have much in common with, and here he was, they could join the same support groups. They could probably swap prescriptions. Loki had been taken apart, tortured, and then sent to do their dirty work.

'I still have the nightmares, the waterboarding, the terror. They aren't called terrorists because they couldn't find something better to call them. PTSD isn't a cute walk through a poppy field.' Tony rolled over in his bed, tangled in sheets, not wanting to get up.

Thor, the poor guy, was just frozen. You could've taken Mjolnir from him and he wouldn't have
noticed. Actually, everyone froze except Nat who, freak of nature, probably saw this one coming. She moved for her gun, just in case Loki combusted.

And, it all clicked for Tony at that point. Sesshomaru had had the utmost confidence in Loki. To Sesshomaru, Loki was uncontrollable, maybe unbeatable. Sesshomaru looked up to Loki. And that meant Sesshomaru viewed Loki as someone at least on his level in power and intellect.

Which alarmed him. They really had no idea what Bambi nor Sailor Moon were truly capable of, still! Point Break was the closest one, and he apparently had memory gap issues.

Clint that night literally jumped like someone tazed him. This was the same guy who put eight arrows into Reindeer Games, who probably even tried to light him up with the Quinjet's turret gun. Clint had moved up to be noticed by the smoking God. Clint's voice sounded like plea that went unheard by the God and the Demon Lord. He just said one word: 'Loki?'.

Loki's words had darkened the air as he turned into a damn magic tree in the middle of his living room. He so called it on house plants, by the way. Just what had he gotten himself into now?!

Then, poof, he was gone! Tony immediately asked Jarvis where. When Jarvis reported back that he was in substorage room 3-b, Sesshomaru menacingly glared at Thor and all but ordered Thor down there.

'Well, who's kidding who. Sailor Moon did order Point Break down there for what was probably going to be some really awkward, past due, brotherly bonding time. Thank biology I am an only child.' Tony remembered Thor walked past them in a trance, dropping Mjolnir along the way like a forgotten sandwich.

His poor floor. First Sesshomaru's mountain dew goo melting it, then Mjolnir denting it. Maybe he could charge that to Agent.

"Good morning sir. Miss Potts is here. Everyone is currently in the central room with the exception of Sir Sesshomaru and Mr. Barton." Tony groaned, groping his side table for ibuprofen he knew existed. Clint was probably out firing arrows into apples with Fury's face on them.

"...jus callim Lor Sessomu." Tony replied half muffled by his pillow, Sir Sesshomaru just sounded too weird. Tony found his advil and downed three tablets with a gulp of what was water, and thankfully not vodka. Tony still had to get Clint back for that one time he pranked him. Tony rubbed his eyes and got up to enter the bathroom.

"Of course sir. I dropped the temperature in the kitchen to accommodate the crabs, though I do urge they be cooked soon." Jarvis informed Tony as he turned on the shower.

"Good thinking Jarvis, we will have a good ol family reunion. I'll even get the potato salad." As Tony began to shower it all clicked back in mind.

The crabs. Sesshomaru. He actually grabbed him. He caressed his fucking stripe. He asked him if he was going to stay. At least he said yes. Since when did he sound so needy? Tony squirted out way too much shampoo in frustration. What exactly was he thinking? Why did he care if he stayed?!

The past three days he avoided thinking about what Sailor Moon would decide. Tony wanted him to stay. He had gotten used to him. Where would the fun be if he decided to leave? Whose ass would Tony watch, maybe even smack again?! Hopefully do more with… no. Bad. Idea.

And of course what would happen if SHIELD found him and decided they wanted a new guinea
pig? Like Tony Stark would let that happen.

"Jarvis remind me never drink and think again. Or touch the Demon Lord. Or any combination of the two." Tony called out, he turned the water cold due to him thinking of a certain testy Demon Lord it made him hard again.

"Noted sir." Jarvis responded and Tony finished his shower, brushed his teeth and slung a towel around his waist. Throwing some gel in his hair and slipping on jeans and a Black Sabbath t-shirt he saw it was only 10:39 am. Not bad for a hangover. He spotted the red and gold Japanese outfit hanging out of place in his closet. It wasn't that bad to have variety, right? Tony wasn't sure why he hadn't gotten rid of it yet, or why he hung it up in his main closet, and not in some sort of storage box.

Tony blamed laziness, he wasn't going to touch the real reason why with a yardstick.

He walked out into the main room to see Rin making pincher motions with her hands, everyone seated, some eating, Steve was watching the pregame to a baseball game with Thor. Loki stood next to Rin, looking freshly showered. Pepper stood with her hands on her hips.

"Rin, your father has a lot of explaining to do. How can he sleep in this long? Oh good, Tony you're up. Go get Sesshomaru, he's slept in long enough." Pepper was all business and Loki translated some of it to Rin who chatted back. Why him? Why did he have to get the Demon?

"Rin says that Sesshomaru is not her father, but her Lord, and that Sesshomaru has not slept in over a month which is why he is not present." Loki responded, though Tony heard a hint of something hiding in Loki's voice. Like perhaps that wasn't all what she said. Natasha didn't say anything, or react in any way however. Neither did Point Break.

"I think that breaks your record, Tony." Bruce pointed; Pepper did not look amused. His own record may have been like four days, but then again he was a 'mere human…or mortal' depending on which supernatural being in his tower you asked.

"Lord Sesshomaru does not require as much sleep as humans do! His stamina is unmatched!" Jaken squawked, and Tony couldn't help but smirk at the innuendo. Natasha also picked up on it, seeing the glimmer in her eye. However, not knowing Toady he could have meant it both ways.

"Do not get me started with you, Jack. You are the absolute worst babysitter. I don't even want to know what you fed Rin when Sesshomaru was gone." Pepper glared at Jaken who huffed. "Tony." Just then the man of the hour entered, looking worse for the wear.

Tony definitely didn't remember his shoulder bleeding last night. The right side of his outfit had been singed off, revealing a nasty raw, blistered wound below. He looked around and Rin went up to him and said something and he shook his head.

"What happened to you?" Tony blurted out, noting while Sesshomaru looked as impassive as ever, he looked paler than usual, which meant he was transparent. Everyone turned to Sesshomaru in response. Sesshomaru definitely didn't seem like the type to display wounds, and his youki could heal him, so why hadn't he done it already?

"...a spar." Sesshomaru responded as Rin picked up a flailing crab. Sesshomaru tapped her on the head gently. Rin, laughing, waved it in the air.

Wouldn't Rin care more that Sailor Moon looked like he had gone through a ninja blender? How used to seeing Sesshomaru injured was she?
"Lover's spat. But don't worry 'Sesshoki' are back on. We can post it on Twitter." Natasha took a sip of coffee and Tony pretended not to be pissed at Loki as he went to get his own coffee. So, Loki decided to take out his Post Traumatic Stress on Sailor Moon?

Tony supposed it would make sense. If Loki challenged Thor, he would be basically challenging the Avengers, and not that Loki could hold much of his own in a one on one fight against Thor.

'But picking a fight with Sailor Moon after he got back from what was essentially an "Eat Pray Love triathlon?" Low blow.' Tony's attitude soured, Sesshomaru didn't look like it phased him, but his ears were flat against his head the entire time he had been upstairs. Tony knew that wasn't normal.

"Brother! That is not the way we greet our loved ones on Asgard!" Thor stood from the sofa in an outburst and Steve turned to Loki as well.

"Well we aren't on Asgard are we Thor?!" Loki shot back. Sesshomaru turned from the both of them, looking bored as usual, except Tony saw his eyes didn't seem to be focused on anything really.

"Hey, guys, the game is about to start!" Steve announced, obviously trying to get Thor distracted. Pepper marched up to Sesshomaru.

"You can't leave your daughter spontaneously for three days to go off loafing about. Jaken is a horrible care taker. He even told her not to bathe because he was afraid of the bathtub. And when I took her to the dentist, and the doctor for a work up the dentist said she has had baby teeth knocked out and the doctor said she had fractures, stab wounds, and evidence of concussions. He said he was surprised she was even alive! Care to explain?" Pepper nearly exploded. Sesshomaru's knuckles cracked, Tony even noted his ears lowered.

"...are you implying this Sesshomaru is negligent?" The temperature in the room dropped a good ten degrees. Fuck. Everyone backed up, even Natasha who instinctively went for a paring knife. Well, everyone except Pepper, Jaken and Rin. Rin just tilted her head up at Sesshomaru, obviously she had no idea what got him so pissed, again.

"No. But someone or some Demons obviously did something to her." Pepper stood resolute and Sesshomaru calmed the temperature in the room gradually warmed. Tony let loose a breath he didn't know he was holding, why couldn't they just have a nice, peaceful morning when he had hangover? Why did he have to prepare for defcon-2?

"Rin, do not listen." Sesshomaru advised and Rin put the placing the crab back into the sink and plugged her ears and hummed a song Tony didn't know.

"The humans do not treat orphans well in my time. Rin was no exception. She was attacked by a local wolf tribe and left for dead. This Sesshomaru then took her as a ward." He explained, and tapped Rin who looked back up to him. Pepper stilled. It was hard to remember life five hundred years ago was pretty brutal. Everything now made total sense.

Everyone looked to cheerful little Rin.

"I apologize. Thank you for your explanation. You still can't just go off on your own anymore." Pepper scolded and before Sesshomaru could respond Tony decided to cash in his request.

"Yeah, about that request you owe me. You can't leave New York City without another Avenger. That's my request. And Loki so doesn't count. You guys together are a disaster waiting to happen."
Tony smirked triumphantly. Sesshomaru stilled, clearly not liking how Tony decided to use that request.

"…Very well. This Sesshomaru accepts." Just then Clint stormed in with a bag and slammed it down on the counter in front of Sesshomaru. Toady jumped and Sesshomaru's eyes widened a fraction.

"You got those blue crabs right? Straight from Charleston?" Clint asked, looking a little tense and a lot more awkward. He acted like a teenager trying to apologize for taking the family car for joyride and hitting a mailbox.

"..." Sesshomaru raised an eyebrow, as if to say he should already know the answer. He shifted his weight to his left leg, which Tony now saw his right pant leg was burned off, and the skin on his knee looking pink and raw. Loki definitely got the drop on him, Loki didn't have a scratch. Tony took an angry gulp of his coffee, burning his tongue.

"Here, I got this for you. You don't eat crabs right? This butcher is an old friend of mine. This is the best venison in the city." Clint still sounded awkward as hell while boasting. Then it made sense.

The Quinjet, Nat slamming Clint, Sesshomaru blocking them and Loki looking savage as all get out. Clint wanted to attack Sailor Moon, not Loki. Christ, everyone had anger management issues. It's a good thing that Loki and Clint are now taking it out on each other in their 'Fight Club' sessions. Let them beat themselves up over their issues and leave Sailor Moon out of it.

"You appreciate the shellfish?" Sesshomaru asked, sounding a bit innocent while peering into in the bag.

"Like a good bullseye." Clint answered. Sesshomaru smirked slightly, feeling vindicated, looking at both Loki and Tony. Tony took another big sip of coffee. Tony didn't feel guilty for making fun of Sesshomaru. Bringing back a bunch of crabs is weird. Clint is weird.

"This Sesshomaru accepts your barter. You may have first choice of crabs after Rin." Sesshomaru's ears went up and his eyes lit with humor. Clint jacked back his elbow and fisted his hand in victory.

"So not fair. This bartering thing has gotten way out of control." Tony took another gulp of coffee. Bruce shot him a knowing look.

Stupid intelligent Bruce. He should have never had that drunken heart to heart with him last night.

"Tony, Sorry, trying to get a proximity barrier up in running using the juice of a guy who isn't here just isn't panning out well. We should just wait till he comes back." Bruce threw his glasses down in defeat.

"That implies if he actually sticks around. He really took what you said the same way Pepper does when I say things: totally wrong." Tony put down the proximity barrier trigger mechanism in defeat.

"He'll stick around. He just needs time to cool off. He was putting off some pretty nasty vibes, like he was about to go full wolverine on something. The other guy didn't like it." Bruce replied and for once Bruce was the optimist.
...yeah, Sailor Moon better stay, Reindeer Games has been on edge, and just carries his stupid sword N*sync everywhere." Tony leaned back in his workshop chair, watching the youki bubble and not expand, almost halfway through the bottle of scotch.

"He hasn't been the only one on edge." Bruce looked to Tony pointedly.

"Who me?" Tony leaned forward, taken aback.

"Well, yeah, you. You're fixated. You've either been out of it or showing Rin Japanese subbed Bill Nye the science guy videos, probably to win her over so Sesshomaru won't take off again. You made bets on where he goes, and what music he listens to. Since when do you care so much about stuff like that? You're totally mystified by the guy." Bruce pointed out, taking a sip of his own tumbler of scotch. Tony poured another for himself.

"He's an unpredictable Demon Lord who is harder to read than the Zodiac Killer's notes and he is Loki's bestie. What's not to be mystified by? The bets were to distract everyone from Bambi's psychotic break." Tony took another sip, and another. Bruce wasn't convinced.

"I think it's more than that. You slapped his ass on the helipad and carried him down to your basement, then dressed up like him. Do you even remember the way you botched your 'hear ain'ts' delivery because your jaw was on the floor?" Bruce lifted his glass as if to cheers his own epiphany. Tony rolled his eyes.

"Ok, one, worth it. Two, bet. Three, indecently dressed." Tony explained, rather poorly, the scotch getting the better of him.

"Worth it?" Bruce asked, clearly amused.

"...He's got a good ass. And he still got me ice cream afterwards. What's a Playboy to do?" Tony admitted and Bruce scoffed.

"What will you do if he leaves?" Bruce retorted and Tony rolled his head and his eyes.

"Have Point Break follow him around singing sonnets until he comes back. You know how bad his singing is, and he already gets under Sailor Moon's skin" Tony smirked.

"I'll get biscuits we can all have dinner tonight and strategize for how we are going to get SHIELD on board." Steve piped up. Teacher's pet.

"...you can have the next choice after Barton." Sesshomaru affirmed, Loki looked amused to hell, glancing in Tony's direction for the first time in days.

"I can get shrimp cocktails." Bruce's smile was too damn big. He knew this would send Tony over the edge.

"Can we cool it with the bartering?" Tony groaned, how did this get so out of control? They were just crabs! Crabs! If they wanted seafood so bad he could have gotten some!

He could also call up his butcher. He was probably better than Clint's too. He could get Sailor Moon a way better cut of venison.

"Says the billionaire. I'll make a fruit salad, no strawberries." Natasha chimed in, pointing to
Pepper who smiled, Tony grumbled again. He had almost forgotten that one time he got Pepper all those damned strawberries.

"I can have Happy swing by the bakery and get a key lime pie." Pepper offered. Traitor. Loki looked to her direction, smiling in anticipation. He did like lime sherbet! And Pepper was indulging Loki. Loki! What in the name of thermonuclear astrophysics was happening?!

"I shall procure more human spirits! Brother accompany me!" Thor exclaimed, not bothering with his inside voice. Loki rolled his eyes, but didn't say no. That, again, was the most expression Tony had seen the God make since his episode.

By the end of the exchange, there was a damn list, Tony was at the bottom with potato salad. Tony never bottomed.

He did need to get laid. He looked over to Sesshomaru who was still inspecting his steak. Sesshomaru definitely looked like he topped.

Eventually everyone went their separate ways except Sesshomaru, Rin, Jaken, and Tony remained in the kitchen.

"We will depart soon Rin." Sesshomaru murmured and she nodded, continuing to color. Jaken looked irritated.

"Lord Sesshomaru, I can't believe you this Magic God's attack upon you go unpunished! These Gods and humans spell disaster! This realm is not your responsibility. I do not wish to see more harm come to us!" Jaken accused, practically jumping and Sesshomaru frowned slightly.

"Do not doubt this Sesshomaru, Jaken." Sesshomaru reassured half-heartedly, as if he neglected the word 'please'. Tony studied the distracted Demon Lord, he caught the blank look in his eyes, the tremor in his hands.

"You don't look so good, Sailor Moon. Go shower so you don't look like motorcycle crash victim of the Isle of Man TT. Pepper got you new clothes, they're in the closet in the spare room." Sesshomaru looked to Tony and he hated the way his gold eyes seemed so sharp and distant at the same time.

Sesshomaru nodded slowly and Tony also didn't like new found obedience. He wanted Sailor Moon to banter with him like he did the morning of the microwave incident.

"He'd be fine if that damned God didn't use his magic poison on him! It's slowing his healing process!" So that's what's got Toady in a spat. Loki could poison Sesshomaru. Great. Poison! Maybe this was Game of Thrones after all.

Loki had clearly been though a lot, and it's obvious that Sesshomaru was the only one he trusted here. Loki must have had really took it personally when Sailor Moon left. Both of them took everything too damn personally.

'Maybe I should have a chat with Loki about poisoning people in my own Tower.' Tony decided to pour some whiskey in his coffee when he refilled it.

"So does your poison affect Loki the same as his does you?" Sesshomaru turned to Tony, face unreadable. Tony had thought that it would spark some sort of emotion in the Demon, but none surfaced. It was like he was deep within his own mind.

"It is a neurotoxin." Sesshomaru corrected, eyes gazing past him, walked by Tony to the bathroom.
Tony remembered the other day when he smiled and this was not even close to the same person.

"That would make more sense if you were like a Snake Demon...since when do Dogs even have venom?" No response from Sailor Moon "So is it the same?" Tony prompted, trying to goad him into giving him more information, more anything than this...zombie.

"With Loki, it tampers with his ability to access his magic temporarily. On him and others depending on the potency and amount, causes extreme pain or death." With that Sesshomaru slipped into the bathroom, sounding as if he was a thousand miles away.

'I guess he isn't feeling chatty, but I got what I needed. If his toxin works that way on as powerful as Loki, it can probably work on the Chitauri, or Thanos and The Other. The magic hampering ability aside, it would be good to have weaponized. Not that I make weapons wholesale anymore, these would just be for Clint, Natasha and I. SHIELD wouldn't be getting access to these.' Tony reassured himself and his brain lit up with possible ways he could use his toxin, perhaps even in the repulsors in his suit.

Specialized, tactical warfare. Better than a nuclear deterrent.

'Thanos. The Other. They have the power to imprison Loki, to turn him inside out and make him say how high when they ask him to jump. They scared Loki into risking his 'better half' to come to the future, to risk his own life. These guys are serious bad news and we need some serious bad news weapons to take them on.' He automatically began to walking up to his workshop where he found Bruce had already started working.

"Sailor Moon says his green goo is actually a neurotoxin that can temporarily block Loki's access to his magic." Tony informed, and Bruce looked up impressed.

"If we can properly synthesize it, we can put it in bullets and on our other weapons. We can get a huge advantage on the Chitauri and their magic." Bruce leaned back, eyes up thinking of all the practical purposes of the toxin.

"Yeah, and remember what Thor said a few days ago? Sesshomaru's youki basically neutralizes magic of a same strength. Sesshomaru is basically a sorcerer's worst nightmare." Tony felt bit less desolate about the world coming to an end. Again.

"More like opposites. Loki did a number on your new crush. It's too soon to say that he is the answer to our prayers here." Bruce ribbed and Tony furrowed his eye brows.

"Tony Stark does not crush. Tony Stark merely observes beauty in many forms, and dabbles in...well most. He is just a form I currently like observing." Tony replied, as non-chalantly as he could, knowing exactly where Sesshomaru was in a shower nude, wet and shimmering.

No. Tony. No. Focus on work.

"So, is that why you were uneasy, bored out of your mind, and drinking like a fish the past few days?" Bruce barbed back, all snark. Tony knew where this conversation was heading.

"Hey, I'm just observing him, nothing more. I'm always bored, and that Demon is weird. I mean crabs? Michael Jackson? And I always drink like a fish." Tony defended, he wasn't lying, he had his special coffee, things rarely kept his attention for long, and really hadn't done anything but observe him, well except the whole wrist thing.

"You're not bored when he's around, you're interested in his youki and toxin, and you haven't expressed the same interest in Loki's magic. Also, your face looked like murder when he came in
this morning looking like roadkill." Bruce twirled a screwdriver and Tony fought the urge to smack it out of his hands.

"Temporary interest, if that. Once I figure him out, which won't be long, I'll move on to the next bigger, better thing. You know how fickle I am. And I am not about to ask Loki if I can study his magic when he seems as chill as a tire fire. And this morning I hadn't had my second cup of coffee yet. You know how I am under caffeinated." Tony took a sip of his spiked coffee. It didn't taste as good as he wanted it to.

"Me thinks the lady doth protest too much." Bruce smirked and Tony almost threw a bolt at him.

"Ugh, not you too with Shakespeare in the park. Even if I wanted to act on my impulse to study more of his physique than just his toxin, he's complicated. This whole thing is complicated. Tony Stark doesn't do complicated." Tony spun in his chair a bit, still thinking of how he was going to break it to Rhodey tonight about Loki and Sesshomaru. Guess he could invite him to dinner.

'Oh yeah, Rhodey, come by for dinner! We got a huge dinner party, oh yeah, and that's a Demon Lord, from five hundred years in the past. He has a human daughter and a Toad servant. Oh, and you know who his best friend is? Yeah. Loki! Remember him? Yeah, turns out he is on our side. Oh well, damn Rhodey maybe you shouldn't have shot the both of them. Bullets only piss off the Demon Lord, yeah he can melt bullets...Oh, and Loki? He can turn into a tree and teleport out of prison.' Tony imagined Rhodey shooting both of them before they could even get to dessert.

"He doesn't seem too complicated, just guarded like someone else I know. Also, you do both speak in the third person." Bruce must be feeling particularly funny today. Tony rubbed his beard wondering how integral Bruce was to the proximity barrier project. 'Aka project electric fence.'

Tony twisted his face, beginning to tinker that was another thing he had to get Sesshomaru's opinion on. Maybe he knew how to make it viable. They could make it bigger, disperse into orbit....

"Sir, Lord Sesshomaru requests entry into your workshop." Tony dropped the bolt he was fiddling with and Bruce chuckled. Tony. Fucking. Stark. Get a grip. Literally.

"Uh. Let him in. Let's see what Sailor Moon wants." Tony said as a freshly washed Sesshomaru came in, wearing a white t-shirt and dark wash jeans. He looked less intimidating in normal clothes that's for sure. God, he was crazy, scary good looking, even in just a white T-shirt.

Tony glanced down at the slender wrist he touched and saw it was blistered over in 2nd or 3rd degree burns, same as his right wrist. Did Loki try to tie him up?

A flurry of rage overtook Tony, out of the other wounds Loki dealt, this one inexplicably grated his brain like a soft cheese. He took another deep gulp of his whiskey fueled coffee.

That was it. He was going to give Bambi a piece of his mind. This was his damn tower, yeah Loki may have some serious PTSD but that did not mean he could burn his friend's hands off because he was too pissed to deal.

Tony locked eyes with Sesshomaru and it was if he had said his thoughts out loud because Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed in comprehension

That was...creepy.

"You seem curious of my toxin, and my youki, am I correct?" Sesshomaru's voice, while stoic, sounded almost soft. Tony nodded, trying to ignore the way Bruce's eyes taunted him. Dick.
"We need every advantage we can get, as you can probably imagine these guys aren't going to show up with muskets. Your neurotoxin is one of the strongest corrosive substances I have seen, and your proximity barrier could easily be an early detection relay if we can make it larger." Tony explained, twirling a stylus because he positively needed something to do with his hands.

"I see. You wish to try to use my toxin on weapons to give you a tactical offensive advantage and my youki for defensive purposes." Sesshomaru looked contemplative, focusing on the holograms in front of him.

"That's the gist of it. Except your toxin also eats through everything, well except Steve's shield which is made of vibranium. It would make it exceptionally hard to analyze." Bruce stated, looking at Tony, seeing his expression darken.

Pause.

"I have a barter to propose." Sesshomaru stated, looking directly into Tony's eyes, his gold eyes gleamed to life for the first time. Tony cursed that his treacherous heart skipped a beat, the moody Demon was a huge problem for him.

"Fine. Great. Is it more seafood?" Tony spat back with sarcasm, the best defense mechanism. Sesshomaru caught it.

"I will provide you my toxin and my youki, if you produce a similar ear device to allow Rin to understand what the humans here speak." Tony was blown away. A personal translator? Could he do it? Yeah. He was Tony Stark, master genius. Besides, anything to snap Sailor Moon out of his funk, ahem and of course for his toxin and the 'electric fence'.

"Yeah, I can figure out a 'com'rin'acator' for her. But we can't really study your toxin without it...well corroding everything." Tony responded and his answer was placed immediately in front of him. Sesshomaru's silk outfit.

"This is Spider Demon silk. It is infused with my youki. My own toxin will not corrode through it." He cut off a portion with a sharp talon and out from his talon dripped the acid green toxin. Sure enough the toxin beaded up on the square of silk, like it was hydrophobic.

"Convenient. Wait you're sure you want us to confetti your party dress?" Tony looked up to him, and all he wanted to do was to dominate him. Sesshomaru tossed his hair. Total Priss.

"I can regenerate it if you leave a good portion intact. I have already trimmed of the portions that had been stained with my blood." Sesshomaru informed him, Tony didn't know if he did that so he didn't have a sample of his blood, or out of his previous reaction the morning of the microwave. He wasn't going to lick his blood again. That was for sure.

"Demon Lord and seamstress. Good to see you don't subscribe to traditional gender roles. But no seriously I'll get on Rin's thing, and this helps. Thanks." Tony groaned. Did he just say thanks? Seamstress? Why was he trying so hard?

"Can we get some more toxin samples before you go?" Bruce asked the smart question and Sesshomaru silently cut off more pieces of his outfit and put more drops of toxin onto them.

"Wait! Who did that ice cream chick give you to listen to a few days ago?" Sesshomaru turned back, ears up.

"Prince, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Stone Temple Pilots, and a soundtrack to Queen of the Damned."
Sesshomaru answered simply.

"Oooh, Queen of the Damned, Vampire soundtrack for the Demon Lord. You know because you both eat humans." Tony prompted. Sesshomaru eyes glittered in mirth.

"This Sesshomaru will not consume a human in this time." Tony and Bruce leaned back, um. What? Tony had not been serious about that. At. All.

Tony knew he had fangs like he ate people, but did that mean he actually did?! Goddamnit this was something he'd have to ask Thor about, and he better not have memory gap issues.

He had Hannibal fucking Lecter in his Tower!

It was then Sesshomaru revealed a small smirk.

'This impossible Demon is fucking with me. Probably. Maybe. Hopefully. I don't think my liver would pair well with a nice Chianti and fava beans. well, I mean, plenty of people have tasted me just in a completely different way.' Tony finished his spiked coffee.

"Ahem. Ok Silence of the Venison, uh...let's stick to music...which band is your favorite?" Tony would have to have a crush on the most dangerous person on this planet.

"In order of preference, I enjoy Nirvana, Stone Temple Pilots, Michael Jackson, Whitney Houston, Prince, Red Hot Chili Peppers, the soundtrack and lastly The Counting Crows." Sesshomaru listed and Tony fist pumped and twirled in his chair, forgetting the cannibalism.

"Oh, Lord." Bruce groaned and Sesshomaru looked to him. "Oh, not Lord as in you, Tony won the bet on which band you'd like best from the four we knew about." Bruce explained, putting his hands up and Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side.

"Finally! Can't wait to rub it in Nat's and Steve's faces. Sorry Whitney, but you so look like a closet grunge fan." Tony celebrated and Bruce hid a laugh.

"...you are the first to choose correctly." Sesshomaru's ears wiggled a bit. Those. Ears. He wanted to bite the edge of one. He wanted to do more.

"What?! Not even Polly your ice cream side-piece got it right?!" Sesshomaru shook his head and touched his side, it glowed blue and his wrist healed, the skin returning to its usual, unmarred smooth ivory and magenta. He wanted to grab it again, to reclaim it.

"...fascinating, my youki is returning. I can now provide you with a youki sample." Sesshomaru's eyes widened, almost surprised at his own youki, then healed his wrists and then put his finger to his folded outfit, and it glowed blue, thrumming as if alive.

"You have assisted this Sesshomaru. I will be off." And with a swish of long hair and a light in his gold eyes he was out the door and Tony was having fun watching him walk away. He really did have a good ass when his hair wasn't in the way.

Pause.

"You are crushing." Bruce carefully picked up one of the silk squares with the toxin. Tony then touched the glowing blue outfit, expecting it to shock or hurt him, but instead some of it streamed up his fingers and wound into his arc reactor.

Tony hadn't predicted that.
"Not factual. He's just a temporary distraction...who I happen to like watching walk away. Jarvis run this toxin will ya?" Tony placed one of the toxin squares on a small imaging platform. He ignored the youki thing, for now.

The platform glowed and whirred to life, instantly images of molecule appeared on the screen. It was a chemical combination Tony didn't recognize, which definitely surprised him considering he knew almost all of them.

"It is a previously unknown chemical compound, however it does have some ancestral roots in what appears to be prehistoric Flora, the closest relative being Dendrocnide moroides. The highly venomous Australian gympie gympie tree whose reputation is 'once stung, never forgotten.' Its toxin has been known to drive some people to suicide the pain is so intense and long-lasting."

Jarvis informed and Tony and Bruce looked at each other uneasily.

"Good to know that after I nearly got my leg singed with it." Tony grimaced and Bruce poked at one of the drops with the screwdriver, nearly dropping it as the metal immediately began to melt and corrode.

"The toxin's corrosive properties appear to also be in the same range as Fluoroantimonic Acid, the strongest acid known to human kind." Jarvis reported and Tony immediately moved any water nearby.

"His neurotoxin, unlike fluoroantimonic acid, does not combust from dihydrogen oxide however." Tony still kept the water away. He didn't need another explosion.

Super weapon. Tony called it.

"And he just makes this faster than Starbucks makes their pike roast." Bruce admitted stared at the molecular compound on the screen rotating.

"It's incredible. It's like the best of both worlds. If we could separate these two compounds out, we could have something that could use on inorganic compounds and something to use against organic ones. We could also make them more potent, increase their effectiveness. Hell, I really could put this on the repulsors." Tony zoomed in on some of the more unstable dipolar bonds.

He wasn't sure how exactly he felt about going back into the weapons business, but he was going to make sure only he, and the Avengers had access to it.

If SHIELD could have their secrets, he could have his.

"Clint will love this. Natasha too. Regular bullets and our explosives may not be enough this time around." Bruce conceded, spinning the now ruined screwdriver.

"We can make you some big brass knuckles coated in the stuff, you know, 1930's prohibition style. Steve will probably love it." Tony grinned and Bruce rolled his eyes.

"I think the last thing the other guy needs is the ability to melt people." Bruce put his glasses on and they got to work. Tony had managed to actually make a proper chamber to house the toxin, after studying the spider silk, for his repulsors.

"Sir Miss Natasha Romanoff requests your presence." Tony leaned back, visibly annoyed. They had just gotten a breakthrough on the proximity barrier by siphoning off the youki on the outfit, adding it with the artificial youki, and putting into capsules. They weren't quite ready yet but it was a great improvement.
Bruce had been mostly working on deconstructing the toxin, separating its molecular structure into the two compounds.

Tony got up, mostly because he could use another drink.

"Alright, tell her highness I'll be right out." Tony walked briskly out of the lab only to be immediately confronted by Natasha.

"Tony, not to pull you away from winning the science fair, but I need you to come with me." Natasha sounded more serious than Tony would have liked. Tony sighed, he was on such a roll and whatever this was about was going to be far from what he actually wanted to talk about.

He approached his bar, and poured himself, strangely enough, a Singapore Sling...he was in the mood for gin, maybe that Demon was rubbing off on him since gin was the only thing he had seen Sailor Moon drink.

"I'm not wearing the cosplay outfit again...and if you made a montage of me wearing it and me tangled up in that fur thing to the song of 'Dont Stop til Get Enough' by M.J. you have got another thing coming." Tony added a lime to his Singapore Sling. Goddamn limes. He couldn't get rid of Sesshoki from his mind.

"Another thing coming? Really Tony like what?" Natasha challenged as she made her way past the living room and surprisingly enough into his own bedroom where Thor stood.

Oh. Kay.

While he could definitely use a good lay, he doubted this would end up less complicated than getting with a certain Demon who he really wanted to drill through his sheets.

"Well...apparently something of the discovery channel variety." Tony, while flattered Natasha and Thor had not only invited themselves into his bedroom, and himself for what could easily be interpreted as threesome, he somehow doubted that was the case.

Natasha snorted. And he took a sip of his drink, gin wasn't that bad.

"As if you could 'playboy'. And no, this is simply the one place where the others can't hear us." Now at this point Tony knew Natasha was fucking with him on purpose.

"Oh, I don't know; Point break has never been known inside voice. And well, me, let's say I'm not bashful." Tony winked and Natasha shook her head. Poor Thor again, looked quite confused. Tony drank for effect.

"I had thought we convened here to discuss my brother and Son of Taisho. If this is meant to be another sort of intimate affair, I will have to—" Tony cut off Thor before he could continue.

"Natasha? Sailor Moon and Bambi? What about them?" Tony became suddenly interested and only half serious. Natasha took that as a cue to shift her weight.

"Last night they got into it, and as I could tell, and still can discern, you aren't happy about it. I witnessed something when they fought right before I broke it off. Tony can you bring up the security video for the elevator and subfloor 3? Aim for about 3:45am to 3:55am." Tony's eyes widened in surprise, he didn't think anyone else was awake then. And Natasha was down there?

Tony took another drink of his Singapore Sling also felt a little sheepish that he hadn't thought of pulling the camera feed himself earlier.
Jarvis replayed the camera feed, he had installed new cameras down there after the steakhouse
debacle. Looks like they definitely came in handy.

Tony studied the footage with Thor and really didn't like what he saw. First came the elevator fight
where Loki threw Sesshomaru back, who was clearly not expecting an attack. That spiked the
temperature in his blood.

Loki fought like Odin was going to marry him off to Thor. He was all reckless fury, and the entire
time was shouting something not in English.

"Aye, he held quite a large amount of ire for Son of Taisho for leaving." Thor pointed out, which
was convenient because Sesshomaru had responded in a tongue that was not English either. Tony
had to assume Natasha didn't know what they were speaking either because she turned to Thor. He
drank again.

Tony watched as, from what he could tell, Sesshomaru attempt to deescalate the situation, and get a
dagger to the shoulder for the effort. That dagger had to be poisoned because he saw the Demon
Lord, for the first time ever, react negatively to an injury.

"That's the gist of what I got from his ambush, but that's not what I wanted you two to look at…
here." Natasha pointed and Jarvis froze the video.

Loki had summoned spiked mines, all glittering and black. He had vines all over the hallway that
blocked or parried any blow Sesshomaru's toxin whip could land to disrupt his magic. The most
disturbing thing was how white his skin looked, and how completely black his eyes were. It was
almost as if the black magic had taken him over.

This. This is what Loki was capable of, and he was just amping up. Tony's spine shivered and his
arc reactor's temperature may have cooled a degree.

Loki's body language, his black magic, rather than the green magic he was used to seeing when he
and Sesshomaru sparred, screamed to Tony that Loki wanted to cripple the Demon Lord.

"I have never seen my brother this way, nor do I know why his magic has taken on a flora theme as
of late. I can only say that he reserves his black magic, like Allfather, for powerful spells, like
conjuring me to earth three years ago or aggressive attacks." Thor explained and Tony sighed
through his nose. Great, Thor was little to no help. He didn't envy Sesshomaru coming back to that
welcoming party. Anger jabbed his lungs that he was cornered by Loki like this. He took another
quick sip of his drink.

"So I observed, it's not over yet however, check out how Pretty Boy reacts here…" the video
continued and he saw Sesshomaru artfully dodge almost what could be described as a cluster fuck
of black magic bombs going off, getting knicked by two spikes.

He landed heavy and Tony clenched his glass, he knew that Sailor Moon would end up fine but
still. He couldn't logically dampen his frustration; he was glad he was hiding it well from Natasha
behind his drink.

Then Loki restrained him. This is what really made Tony's blood simmer, obviously if Sailor Moon
was serious about this fight he would have used his Backstreet Boy sword by now. Sesshomaru
was holding back.

But Loki wasn't holding back….wait.

"Stop it here Jarvis." Tony was suddenly interested because Sesshomaru's eyes bled fully red, just
like how he had seen them after his scry, and his claws were almost wolverine length. He also, noticed the blood from his wounds that had gotten on the floor, strangely pulsed.

But what really caught his attention was his smile. It was cold, sinister, predatory, and his teeth were all sharp, the farthest thing from what he usually saw from when Sailor Moon fought. Not at all the smile he wanted to see again. This version of Sailor Moon could eat someone.

Loki, for being so smart; was a moron. He cornered a pissed off Dog Demon. Tony studied Thor’s reaction, he didn't seem shocked but at the same time his face was stony and serious.

He then saw Natasha enter the frame from a ceiling drop and Sailor Moon unleashed an invisible shockwave that rippled through Loki's magic. Loki frowned for a moment, only for his lips to upturn as if in response to a challenge.

Natasha, in the feed took a half-step back and Jarvis paused.

"Tony, you've studied their magic and youki. What was that?" Tony had no idea. He hid behind his drink again, drinking.

"Yeah, not sure about that one. Whatever it was it couldn't have been that powerful, it didn't cancel out any of Loki's magic and we couldn't see it." Tony supplied, just realizing that Sesshomaru hadn't used any youki yet.

"Not powerful in terms of damage, but whatever he did, chilled my bones. Nothing does that. I barely could hold my gun straight and this wasn't even aimed at me. This triggered a response in me just like when the Other Guy comes out. Loki before feared Hulk, he should've backed down but instead it looks like he was about to fully engage. We are beginning to see what they're capable of." Natasha explained. Tony rocked back on his heels.

"Miss Romanoff, I believe what you experienced was Son of Taisho's Killing Intent. His reaction here is his Demon Blood has taken control of his mind." Thor approached.

"So he wanted to kill Loki here? And… just what about his Demon Blood?" Tony started, angling the feed to a different camera for a different, closer viewpoint. He sipped his drink.

"Demons, when serious about a duel, a kill, or intensely provoked will unleash this effect. As for his Demon Blood that is a bit more complicated." Thor seemed to be speaking, with his mind completely elsewhere. Tony and Natasha turned to him, eyebrows raised.

"You see friends, most Aesir thought of Demons as you see here, bloodthirsty, savage and mindless. They did not have a positive opinion of Demons because when left with no other options, their Demon Blood will take over and they revert to a ceaseless bloodlust. Nothing, save exhaustion, their own death, or the death of their target, will stop it." Thor explained, as if sifting to properly explain what he saw before him. The room fell eerily silent.

Yet, despite this, he still had a hard time rectifying what he saw on the screen with the man whose ears twitched when he guessed 'Nirvana' correctly.

"Why did this not escalate further Thor?" Natasha pressed. The video continued and even Tony saw the pulse of green energy at Sesshomaru's hip, the Backstreet Boy sword. After that, and Natasha drawing her glock 17, they all saw the blood erase itself from Sesshomaru's eyes, and Loki followed suit.

"His sword, Bakusaiga, must have helped him see reason. This…behavior from Son of Taisho is quite abnormal. In all my fights against him, or alongside him, he never acted this way…neither did
my brother. They are both under much stress here…I feel as though as I must train with Mjolnir after seeing this." Tony noticed Thor shift uneasily.

Thor must obviously felt some sort of responsibility to help them both through this, or at least be the one person to count on to deescalate this sort of situation, not Natasha.

"If you think you couldn't break up a serious fight between those two Thor I'd advise you hit the gym do what you need to until you can. If they can't control themselves, or we can't, SHIELD will. It'd be detrimental to hand them over to SHIELD but I will be given no other choice if this happens again." Natasha was as serious as a car bomb. Tony didn't want that to happen. At all.

"At least Bruce has company in the rage monster department. Oh… and Thor, pop quiz, do Demons eat people!?” Tony pointed to Thor and that caught the golden haired God's attention. Natasha's eyes got wide, even she didn't think about that.

"Aye. Though not all Demons did, some were herbivores." Thor supplied Tony's jaw dropped. Natasha just muttered something to herself inaudibly. Sesshomaru definitely wasn't a vegetarian.

"Of course Loki would have a best friend who eats people." Then Thor caught on.

"Make no mistake my friends, Son of Taisho though he may be he may be what mortals refer to as an apex predator, he sees the consumption of humans as beneath him. He wouldn't feast upon you all." Thor elaborated, putting his hands up. Great, Sailor Moon wasn't going to eat them not because of ethics, but because of his own arrogance.

"I'm insulted." Tony put his hand to his chest in mock offense and Natasha just snorted.

"I won't report to Fury you're jealous you haven't been eaten yet." Natasha admitted and before Thor could respond there was a knock on the bedroom door and Tony shut off the holoscreens. They had to monitor them, he couldn't let SHIELD have Loki and Sesshomaru as test subjects, and realistically Thor wouldn't allow it either.

"Come in and join the fun, Point Break was just about to put on some Barry White." Tony called out and Bruce entered.

"Sorry for interrupting was looks to be a new type of team building exercise." Bruce smiled wanly.

"Exercise with emphasis on cardio, Coach Natasha said I needed to do more." Tony admitted and Natasha rolled her eyes.

"Wouldn't hurt, though I wanted to let you know I separated and began the synthesis of the toxins." Bruce said it to Tony, but was looking at Natasha. They both were thinking the same thing: she couldn't tell Fury.

"You scratch my back I'll scratch yours. A barter." Natasha smirked and Tony groaned. Goddamn impossible Demon Lord started a bartering obsession.

"Fine. I'll adjust the locator to react to changes in his youki intensity and monitor Loki more as long as you don't tell SHIELD about our toxin…damn barter system." With an affirmative look from Natasha, Tony finished his drink and noticed the odd look Bruce gave him for his choice in fruity cocktail.

"Singapore Sling?" Bruce raised his eyebrows and Tony just grinned as they left his room to go back to the lab.
"I think if everyone else in my tower is going fruity I'm allowed to as well." Tony replied mildly, entering the lab to begin work on the 'Com 'rin' acator' and his own suit.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the delay! This chapter needed a lot of tinkering, with Tony coming to terms with making weapons again and I am in the process of moving to Shanghai and starting a new job so I have been busy!

I wanted to get this chapter out so there may be some grammar errors. either way I hope you enjoyed it! Let me know what you think!

-TL
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loki and the Fight Club.

*(*)

Loki had been enjoying a leisurely cat nap on the balcony which he truly needed after being dragged out by Thor to a mortal's spirit store and using quite a bit of magic making that speech necklace for Rin.

Sesshomaru would have never asked Loki outright to make something of such for her. But he could tell she ached to speak to more than a handful of people in this region of Midgard, and he had the means.

So he created a translating necklace for her, and he could tell it satisfied Sesshomaru because he then went to seek out Stark to see if he could make a device similar so she could also understand. Of course he didn't have the magical capabilities to make her communications work both ways, for that itself would be all-speech.

Loki twisted his face in a devious smile when he had learned that Sesshomaru bartered with Stark for her device.

Sesshomaru letting a vulnerability known was significant. He loathed admitting that there was something he could not provide that mortal girl. He trusting Stark with such a request was a telling sign Sesshomaru reciprocated Stark's interest.

'How fun. If only Sesshomaru didn't seem to be so stubborn, and recently unstable.' Loki doodled an image of Sesshomaru and the jagged black markings in the sky, sun blocked by a cloud.

Loki knew unstable. The entirety of his being practically was now. He was an active fault line of magic energy and mental dissociation. So he could feel it when it was happening to someone else, especially someone so close to him.

Letting his mind wander, Loki delved into the events of today's predawn morning.

"Who are you Godling? Just who are you?" His voice taunted, dark blue magic spreading like wires in his mind. He couldn't see, couldn't feel his own magic, it vanished. His magic abandoned him. His senses failed him.

Time passed.

"I am...Loki Prince of Asgard." Loki's voice scratched at his throat like a centipede had traveled down it.

He was crowned prince of Asgard, he could be their King! He was far more capable than his brother Thor.
There existed few he considered truly worthy of a throne. And the most worthy person he knew of left him nearly five hundred years ago.

But those memories...The cerulean blue wires had impaled and infected them. He resented those times. The times his father never chose him. The time where he stood in Thor's shadow. The time when those five Aesir ambushed him and Sesshomaru had to rescue him! Him! After he ripped apart and even ate some of those Aesir!

He didn't need his help! He didn't need anyone! They would all just betray him! Just like Allfather did! Just like Thor! Just like Sesshomaru!

"Oh no Godling. Not anymore. Who are you?" The wires crossed and like so many needles impaling inward, his mind bled. He would say his only sense left was his hearing, but he knew the voice came from inside his head.

He often heard the voices murmur inside his mind. Even when his ears bled down to his collarbone, his scalp was peeled back and his chest was carved open.

Time passed by him again.

"I am Loki of Asgard!" Loki heard his voice, but this time it plead. How many times had he been asked this question? Who he was? Didn't the Other know who he was?!

He lived in Asgard. He had an older brother whom he would accompany on conquests. He had a father and a mother. His mother doted on him. His father was distant. Long ago he had a friend. He was a Demon Lord and once they assassinated a pair of Panther Demons who slaughtered a mortal village in his lands. Those were facts.

But why...just why was he so angry?! He hated them! All of them! They had all forsaken him!

"Oh no. No I dare say not. Not even you believe it true any longer Godling." The wires surged, like prowling, searching vipers, looking for the right synapse, the right nerve ending, the last memory that would make him break.

Time wound round and round.

His bones broke, but the unrelenting torment across his body made it difficult to discern which specific ones were broken.

Thor. Sesshomaru. They didn't always let him down. They didn't always hurt him. He had that one untainted memory. He did.

"I am Loki." He heard the wires crackle and spark in laughter, alive and focused, they would eventually find it. That last bastion of sanity he kept so close.

"Godling, wrong again. It is ok. We have plenty of time to study you. Now tell me, tell your forger, who you are." The wires found it. Loki thought he had hidden the last of him so deftly, so stealthily. The last, green and black glowing memory that the hatred didn't stain. It was an insignificant memory. Really. It was no glorious victory, climax of pleasure, nor a sonnet wove with love.

It was a glossy holograph of a simpler time: He, his brother, and his long lost friend arguing over who defeated the most enemies in the glade of dead Scorpion Demons. That was it. And in an instant it was blue, inside out, and he felt something crumble and deteriorate.

No. That was all they did! They only tried to steal his victories from him! They only were after their
own selfish gain.

An eternity passed, his mind glowed an otherworldly cerulean blue.

The Other understood his pain. He was showing him his path. He will show him how to achieve his glory! His victory! His destiny!

"I am…Lo…I am...at your command." Loki knew the voice wasn't quite his, but did it really matter anymore?

"Yes, yes my broken blade you are. Let us depart; there is work to be done." The wires thrashed in his mind as they retracted, stinging and slashing his mind like claws. Loki opened his eyes, and saw only hate.

He awoke from his nightmare before well dawn. Though truthfully the nightmare wasn't as severe as they had been in Asgard. Perhaps it was due to Tenseiga, the weapon he helped forge. With his now sweaty temple on on Sesshomaru's unwounded shoulder, he slowly sat up to look at him. He didn't regret confronting him and Sesshomaru wouldn't want him to. Sesshomaru ran and Sesshomaru knew it. Loki had, however, underestimated perhaps how little rest his friend had been getting, and how low his youki was.

He had looked over to Sho, who appeared almost frail and when sleeping.

Sesshomaru's own head had rested against the wall, his hair absolutely everywhere. Loki knew the reason he didn't tie it back was because it's how his father kept his hair. Yet, he surely thought Sesshomaru would have had thought it practical to tie it back when sleeping.

Vain Demon.

He, however, regretted cornering Sesshomaru. He didn't think that his Demon Blood would take over so quickly. And his Killing Intent! Loki shuttered that his own black magic thought it as a challenge and not a signal to back down.

'If Bakusaiga hadn't had pulsed, if Romanoff hadn't come down to investigate we would have most assuredly done irreparable damage to the structure, to the trust of the Avengers, and most importantly to each other. I doubt very much both of us would have walked away from that, unless Thor managed to break up the fight.' Loki hadn't realized how stressed, how anxious he had become. It was as if he was in another prison, one with invisible walls when Sesshomaru was gone.

Rin and Jaken aided somewhat, and he watched after them, but that wasn't the same. He couldn't naturally interact with any of the Avengers, no matter how strangely Tenseiga murmured to him. Yes, he was positive that the sword was trying to say something to him, what he had no idea.

Loki had teleported silently to the living room of the tower, knowing sleep would be elusive the rest of the night. He opened a cabinet to retrieve a glass for water when he heard clacking and hissing. Sesshomaru definitely had returned with shellfish. He misted them with magic to put them all to sleep. If only he could do the sleep spell to himself, wouldn't that be useful?

He did, also regret losing his control of his magic. It had only happened once before when he slew the uru dragon. He was desperate, terrified, but most importantly outraged.

His black magic had acted on instinct and it unfurled into a lotus blossom.
Loki would never forget the way Sesshomaru looked when the dragon released him. Loki thought he was surely dead. His head was bleeding profusely, his skin blue from lack of oxygen, and his chest cavity was completely caved in.

Sesshomaru was completely motionless and sprawled out at an impossible, twisted angle on the ground.

It wasn't until he forced air into his lungs and saw him sputter that Loki started breathing too.

Loki couldn't have lived with himself if he had gotten Sho killed over some frivolous daggers. His magic, before then, had never taken on any flora configuration before. And it hadn't since until Sesshomaru came back. He didn't know what it meant. The exploding gumtree seedpods were quite deadly, useful if he could learn to control them.

'Frigga may know why my magic has decided to change its structure, but the Nines knows if I'll ever be able to converse with her again. She didn't deserve the way I said farewell to her. She didn't deserve Odin's decision to bring me back from Jotunheim as an infant. She didn't deserve my presence in her life, she had a son already. Yet, she took me in, made me feel loved, well as much as she could. Really. I couldn't expect her to disobey Odin but so much. On second thought, she could know something behind Sesshomaru's new scrying ability.' Loki frowned, looking at the sink filled with crabs of all things.

He heard a muffled noise behind him. He turned, spotting Clint leaning against a wall, lit partially by the lights of the city and the moon.

"Couldn't sleep either huh?" Clint announced his presence and asked casually at the same time. They had had snippets of conversations over the past three days when Loki felt like being seen, or when they had their spars. He couldn't allow the Avengers to think he was weak, or mentally unstable when he was to help lead an invasion against such a great armada. That didn't exactly inspire confidence in victory.

However, he didn't actively seek out company either. Loki didn't really see the point in attempts at fraternization with the mortals, knowing not much would come of it.

"I believe there is a phrase here on Midgard 'No rest for the wicked'." Loki flashed a smile as he filled his glass with water. Clint left the wall and approached him, sitting now at the counter near Loki.

"It's actually no rest for the weary, 'No Rest for the Wicked' is a song. And you definitely look more weary than wicked right now." Clint noted, resting his elbows on the counter a slight smile on his strong chin.

"I must work on that then. Can't disappoint my adoring fans." Loki sliced his face into a sickle of a forced smile "What of you?" Loki turned the attention from himself, noting Clint's soft hair was sticking up and his face had pillow impressions on it. He wore a yellow t-shirt with the words 'I feel like Kobe' on it in purple script. His muscles were still well defined and shoulders broad and strong even resting casually in the night.

"You're not the only one who gets nightmares." Clint admitted and Loki's stomach clenched. He took a gulp of water, hiding his guilty expression with the glass.

"Ugh, don't give me that look. It's not always about you." Clint rolled his eyes and Loki relaxed, though a bit confused. "We all have ghosts that haunts us, things we've done, things done to us. I
can tell you don't want to talk about it, but, well, just don't spend all your time looking back." Clint ran his fingers around on the counter top, keeping his eyes on Loki. Loki put his glass down, revealing his surprised expression and felt a small smile creep onto his face. He hadn't truly smiled in days. Loki chanced conversation.

"I believe, Clint, that I may just be one of those ghosts of which you speak." Loki responded, his whisper sounded like a shout in the dark living room.

Clint just reached across the counter and poked his chest with a calloused finger. His chest took to his touch like a fish to water.

"Yup. Definitely a ghost, because you can touch ghosts and feel their chests rise up and down. Come off it, You're a demi-god, you're just as alive or more so the rest of us." Clint smirked and Loki's eyes flashed, he wasn't quite a demi-god, but Loki didn't want to ruin their banter.

"I do suppose you find me immortal… it'd be quite hard to be a specter wouldn't it?" Loki smiled with his eyes and examined the assassin casually sitting across from him, as if this was a normal occurrence.

"Aren't you and Thor immortal? What about Fancy Pants?" Loki leaned back against the cabinet behind him thoughtfully. He rolled his shoulders and grinned wickedly.

"No, we are not, but worry not dear archer, I do not have any deigns on expiring anytime soon." Loki ran a long finger around the rim of his water glass, making a slight squeaking sound, expertly hiding the fact that the last sentence was a blatant lie.

"Who's worried? If you three were immortal it'd be an unfair fight for Thermos or whoever this guy is. Thor's the brawn, you're the brains, and Fancy Pants is all style points." Loki tilted his head to the side, no one had ever complimented his fighting abilities like that before. He must had been thinking of their previous spar. It had gotten rather heated.

"Who is Kobe?" Loki changed tactics, throwing Clint off.

"What? You turning into Fancy Pants now with the random question of the day?" Clint leaned back confused, but playing along. Loki smirked and rolled off the cabinet he had been leaning on, all feline in his movements, facial included.

"I've already turned into him once, suffice to say once is enough. I mean your shirt." Loki's eyes lit up and glowed green in the gray of the dark kitchen. Clint chuckled softly, it charmed Loki to make him laugh and not glower at him.

"Yeah, you should definitely stay you. And the shirt is a joke, Nat got it for me because Kanye West, a musical artist I like, but she doesn't, wore it. I don't like basketball either, another part of the joke, because Kobe is a really good basketball player." Loki heard Clint's explanation, but only listened to the first sentence. His unintentional compliment made him sway his body languidly from side to side in forbidden satisfaction.

'Oh Clint, if you only knew me as I once was. For you, however, I will cease to look back as much and focus on moving forward.' Loki noticed Clint regarding him with curiosity. 'He means for me to continue this conversation does he?' Loki put a long, curled finger to his lips in thought.

"I would, I should think, like to listen to Kanye. The music of Asgard, while grand, can be quite stagnant and uninspired. Surely if Sho can find music worth listening to in this realm, I can as well. That is if yours is worthy of me" Loki provoked, still swaying lazily like a panther prowling a
jungle. He saw Clint swallow and lean forward once more, lips quirking to one side of his stubble covered jaw.

"Is that a challenge?" Clint asked, drumming his calloused fingers on the counter, head forward in anticipation. Loki could see him more clearly now, the strength in him, the conviction and integrity he saw and immediately appreciated when making that first fateful stumble out of the portal to locate that blasted Tesseract.

"It is an earnest request." Loki's eyes crinkled in victory at not only mirroring Sesshomaru's and Clint's conversation from a few days ago, but mimicking Sesshomaru's voice perfectly. He couldn't help the smile that splayed across his face. Tormenting the archer was a temptation he would most certainly indulge in. He watched the shock blaze across Clint first, then settle into recognition that the God was indeed messing with him. Clint shook his head.

"Wow, Clint you just walked right into that one didn't you? Just wait and see Loki, or listen, or whatever. I'll make us a playlist for today's Fight Club. It will be awesome." Clint stood, stretching like an athlete would, and Loki stopped swaying, feeling that Clint would be leaving soon.

"I think the point is that I shall be the judge of that." Loki, with innate agility, shrunk the distance between himself and the counter in one singular movement. With arms locked and wide he put both arms on the counter and leaned forward eyes weighing the stretching mortal before him, studying the way his dormant muscles flexed and released. They were close, maybe ten inches away from each other. Loki smelled him he was so close, he smelled of sleep, sweat and clean cotton.

With arms still overhead, and eyes scrunched due to stretching, Clint opened one light brown eye, almost as a wink, Loki thought.

"Prepare to be impressed." Clint raised his eyebrows and Loki narrowed his like he was about to pounce.

"Clint, I'm sure your efforts will not be in vain." If Loki had fangs like Sesshomaru they would have flashed in the muted moonlight under his green eyes.

Clint chuckled, a hair nervously.

"Oh they won't be. I'm gonna blow you away. Anyway I'm gonna go shower before Steve steals it. He is an early riser and takes princess showers." Clint released his arms, letting them fall and rolled his shoulders a few times before setting off for his room. Loki didn't fail to notice Clint's need to explain his departure, as one would a friend.

"Oh, I already am." Loki murmured to the darkness as he teleported back down to his quarters, water and nightmare forgotten.

When he arrived in the absolute darkness of the storage room, it took his eyes a bit of time to adjust, but Loki could have sworn he saw that Sesshomaru's markings had spread across his body like black curls. However, when he blinked and adjusted his eyes, they appeared normal, albeit Sesshomaru convulsed in the throes of a potent nightmare. Loki would have guessed he scryed in his sleep, but he knew such things were nigh impossible.

Loki went to his friend's side and sat back down beside him, noticing his twitching eyelids and before he could cast a calming spell Sesshomaru's eyes shot open, all red with black at the edges. Loki recoiled back.
'I have never seen his eyes like that before, not even when he transformed.' Loki immediately cast the calming spell onto Sesshomaru, knowing his weakened youki state would allow his magic to take hold rather than render it neutralized. Sesshomaru blinked and his eyes focused on Loki, wide and irises tight and small.

He was trembling as if cold.

"Loki?!" He stated like he hadn't expected the God to be at his side.

"Boo! It is a time for nightmares and ghosts it seems." Loki whispered, lips curled and Sesshomaru blinked again, expression glassy.

"I remain fatigued. This Sesshomaru shall continue to rest." Loki caught Sesshomaru's implication, that he would not awaken for quite some time.

"Worry not, I shall feed Rin and ensure Jaken remains unmolested until you awaken." Loki reassured and Sesshomaru merely closed his eyes again. Loki looked to the small water Demon and the mortal girl, Jaken still clutching Tenseiga. Loki would protect them; he would protect them all...

"Lowly ocean scuttler, how dare you taunt me!?!" Loki snapped out of his recollections, hearing Thor shout from inside the tower. They must be starting to cook the crabs.

"Thor, maybe you should get Mjolnir, that crab means business." Rogers countered. Loki grinned.

Thor's mortal spirit store errand had run exasperatingly long. Thor couldn't decide what to purchase, but he had told Loki that Sesshomaru drank gin, which surprised him since Japan did not have that particular spirit in that time. Loki sussed out he must have simply preferred its smell.

Loki disliked the way Thor regarded him, like he was damaged, or hurting. He was over it. Completely. It absolutely didn't affect him at all.

He had completely healed his injuries, he like Clint said was tough. Thor regarding him as if fragile glass was not helping his situation, but Loki knew that Thor was attempting his best efforts.

'Thor thought just because he attempted one heart to heart that we are brothers again. We were not, and will never be. Odin is not my father, neither was Laufey, Frigga is still my mother, however I doubt she'd agree.' Loki stretched out on the balcony and began to use his magic to weave designs in the air. He enjoyed his quiet pastimes of magic runes, unconsciously looking at the blue sky he noticed he was tracing lines into it. Lines on blue. Not a dissimilar hue to what his skin truly looked like.

He was a Frost Giant. A monster in more ways than one. A being capable of causing frostbite just from a single touch. Clint's question about the immortals rang in his mind. He thought he was immortal once. He thought he was a lot of things once, like Thor's brother.

'And, well perhaps Thor is right, perhaps out of everyone Sesshomaru knows me best, but he was still absent for five hundred years of my life. What does that say about me? The one person who knows me best was absent for half my life? Not that it was his fault...’ Loki made some runes in the air, debating if he would ever tell Sesshomaru of his true Frost Giant heritage, his decision leaned to no.

'If only Thor and I hadn't been on Alfheim for all those years. If only Heimdall's sight wasn't blocked of Midgard...We may have known what happened to all the Demons.' Loki thought sourly. Loki closed his eyes.
Loki did not waste his time much on the mysteries of the universe, but the fate of every Demon, including his best friend, on Midgard always bedeviled him. Not only had they vanished, but every trace of their existence, memories, culture, buildings, even most graves and remains, had been spirited away.

Or obliterated, but Loki refused to believe that.

He refused to believe that Sesshomaru would go and get himself killed while he was away. No matter how reckless Sesshomaru could be, it seemed like every time he saw the Demon next he grew in strength and skill. He couldn’t fathom, that the last time they spoke was last time he would ever speak to him, or cut own another opponent together.

Especially since their last words were an argument over his foolish half-brother.

"Why fret so over this half Demon? It was his own foolishness that led him to his fate. And let’s not forget his mere existence which not only cost you your father, but almost your entire Lands and life!" Loki stood next to the sacred tree, irritancy clear as day on his brow. Loki had no idea what possessed Sesshomaru to come here and ask him this favor to remove this arrow. He could not, it was not a type of magic he could wield. He was no pure being, to be quite sure.

"...I did not ask you for your assessment of our situation. I merely asked for your assistance."

Sesshomaru's ears lowered, voice stony. Loki rolled his eyes, the day Sesshomaru asked for Loki's opinion on any member of his family would be the day Thor gave him Mjolnir.

Sesshomaru was very secretive over his emotions towards his family members. He rarely spoke of his mother, he only stated that she ruled over her own Kingdom and that she and his father had never intended to live together or unite their lands.

He saw her rarely.

His half brother he said little as well. He said the first time he encountered him, he was a child and he struck him. He confessed it was half out of jealousy, half to reinforce the point that he could not be apart of his family.

Which to Loki made sense since everyone in his family either abandoned Sesshomaru or he was forced to kill. Sesshomaru felt no filial love for him, but he didn't want him to be discovered and captured to be used against him for a bid at sovereignty over the West by the North.

"Sesshomaru you owe nothing to the literal bastard your dull father stupidly chose over you."

Loki immediately found himself pinned against the same tree by his throat, Sesshomaru eyes flashing in the mottled light. Loki knew he had struck a chord; he did it purposefully.

"I will not suffer your lies Loki! My father knew my strength; he knew me capable. It was a test."

Sesshomaru hissed almost sounded like he was convincing himself. Loki smirked in victory.

"Your thick father used you. His actions led you to killing your own family. Your father's own brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, and friends betrayed you. His unbridled selfishness and callous view of your own well-being almost cost you your life. Your father, though you laud him so, is staggeringly undeserving of it. He never gave you your due respect, and dismissed you constantly or on a mere whim. His dissatisfaction with all you accomplished and are never sat well with me. It's a feeling and position I know quite well. And we both clean up our brother's messes don't we?"

Loki's choked voice shattered something in Sesshomaru. His grip on Loki's throat loosened and he
tilted his head down so his bangs hid his eyes.

"...leave my Lands. I do not wish to see you for some time." Sesshomaru released him and Loki fought to not slide down the tree. Loki knew Sesshomaru would most likely not agree with his words, but in time he would see his point of view as valid.

"Fine by me. You can deny the truth all you want Sho but don't take it out on me. I'll be on Alfheim for a long excursion, I will visit when I return." Loki stood and brushed himself off and Sesshomaru simply walked away.

Only he didn't see him after Alfheim, despite how much he searched Midgard and realms beyond. Loki was not one for regrets, but one he did harbor was the last conversation he had with Sesshomaru.

Anyway, the surly Demon Lord existed here now. This time is all about second chances apparently. He felt something block his sun. He glanced up to see Stark towering over him, which was rare considering he was taller than the mortal.

He had been expecting Stark though.

It confused Loki at first why let his Demon Blood take over when Sesshomaru had more than a few outs.

Unless, he thought of someone he wanted to protect, someone with whom he had been in contact with recently. Dog demons could be quite protective when cornered.

He most likely knew Jaken and Rin had Tenseiga, leaving them protected ...which left a certain inventor who he recently 'physically encountered', whatever Sesshomaru meant by that.

"Ok Reindeer Games, we are gonna set a few ground rules." Loki sat up, unsurprised Tony was trying to pull rank. He knew Tony enjoyed dominance.

"I believe we are a little past that." Loki almost purred. Stark knelt down and got in his face.

"Don't get cute. This is my house; it even has my name on it in case you get amnesia. We are allies, we are working together and who knows maybe we can even get along." Stark began, he could feel his anger simmering beneath the surface, like earlier in the morning. It was well hidden but Loki looked for it.

Loki had been observing Stark for the past few days sporadically. His drinking habit increased, as did his badgering of his companions and obsessive betting games about Sesshomaru's next location and musical preferences. Loki figured he most certainly did not want to see Sesshomaru leave.

He also did not miss the way Stark regarded Sesshomaru when he had just showered, nor what the invention he made for Sesshomaru symbolized.

Stark had a marked interest in Sesshomaru.

"So. While you are here, no assaulting people. What you and Clint do, sparring, fight club, whatever, cool, go nuts. But I watched the tape and you roughing up Sesshomaru was no agreed upon thing. You jumped him, and poisoned him! No more of that crap." Loki blinked. Stark was serious if he wasn't using any metaphors or unusual analogies.
He used Sesshomaru’s real name.

"I accept. It won’t be a repeat performance from me I assure you." Loki said sincerely. He didn’t need Stark’s eyes boring in the back of his head everywhere he went.

He already got that from Thor, and a lesser extent Clint, though the intention of the stares were dramatically different than the one Stark would give him most assuredly.


It wasn’t much later that Clint found him for their daily spar.

To be honest, he didn’t know why it started. He just knew the morning after Sesshomaru left and the night prior where he, more or less, explained the circumstances behind his failed invasion; Clint strode up to him, eyes glinting, and explained his terms.

'I knew Clint needed a target for his unwanted aggressions. So did I. It worked out quite nicely that we could exercise our demons together, no offense meant, Sho.’ Loki grinned to himself at his own joke.

Loki knew Clint's sarcasm was a defense mechanism for something greater; he and Clint both had something great within themselves with which to deal. Loki may not ever fully deal with it before the Other arrived, but it was what it was. Sparring with Clint gave Loki more joy than sulking about Stark tower with Tenseiga, having Rin attempt to cheer him up, or being coddled by Thor. Clint was far better suited for sparring with Romanoff, or perhaps Stark, but that didn’t matter. No, logic was most certainly thrown out the window.

'Thrown out the window…’ Loki was on a roll. 'By the Nines these mortals will be the death of me before I see the first cruiser of the Mad Titan's fleet.' Thought Loki as he followed Clint to the sparring room or 'gym' as the mortals referred to it.

When Clint set up the rules for the spar, or as he called it 'Fight Club.’ Loki chuckled. Clint did always like structure. He informed him the first rule of Fight Club is that you didn't talk about Fight Club.

Fine. He was going to tell Sho anyway, but something told him the first rule was likely symbolic, or in reference to something he didn’t quite catch.

The second rule of their Fight Club was no talking during fight club. Except to signal if you were finished for the day.

The third rule about Fight Club was no weapons, including magic and shoes.

Their first spar was all tense silence and uneasy stances. Loki enjoyed it anyway but he wasn’t sure if Clint had. Especially since he ended it by throwing Clint to the floor.

Just having Clint’s undivided attention was enough to put Loki’s wavering ego into orbit.

He didn't expect a second spar but surprisingly Clint sought him out from his quasi in the storage room where he was studying Tenseiga and braiding Rin's hair.

Their second spar flowed better, Clint loosened up his stances. Loki still knocked him to the floor again however. At the end, when they ended Clint shook his hand.
Clint shook his hand! And he initiated it!

And his third he recalled Clint even shared a detail about his personal life with him. When under the influence of the scepter he dared not probe too deeply into his upbringing, he only learned it wasn't all entirely pleasant.

"You fight, a bit, like an acrobat I once knew." Clint commented at the end of their third spar. Loki furrowed his eyebrows, was Clint opening up to him?

"An acrobat, such as in your Midgardian theatres and circuses?" Loki inquired, still admiring the way Clint's ribbed tank top stuck to his obliques from sweat caused by their spar.

"Yeah. A bit. He was really good at keeping his balance when tumbling. He was a good guy, bit of a gambler but a good guy." Clint sounded almost wistful. Loki gathered Clint must have known this individual quite well.

"Well, I do as well, enjoy a good gamble." Loki, prompted. He wanted to see the conversation go somewhere, he selfishly wanted Clint to open up to him. His pulse quickened, perhaps he would.

"Yeah, well, let's just say he went all in, one too many times, and didn't come back from one of them." Clint pulled away from their closeness, Loki sensed that they have been somewhat close.

"Ah, well, for shame. I must say it's a fool's errand to risk it all without a backup plan. One must always have an ace up one's sleeve." Loki conjured an ace of hearts. He what he knew Clint wanted to hear. He didn't dare breathe that perhaps this acrobat friend of his and himself had a bit more in common than an ironic sense of balance.

If only his physiological sense of balance transferred to his mental state.

"Heh, yeah, so what's your ace up your sleeve then? This whole thing seems like quite the gamble for you." Clint keenly leaned back on the wall of the gym and suddenly Loki became the prey. He had to escape from Clint's keen gaze, reverse their position.

"I do believe that the point," Loki approached, still glistening from sweat, hair wet and limp against the racing pulse point of his neck. "of the ace is that you don't know what it is, unless it's needed, Clint." He had meandered his way dangerously close to Clint, close enough to smell the slight sour and musky scent of his sweat and see a drop go down his collarbone. And with a haughty smirk he teleported from the gym, all drama and intrigue.

Loki wanted to ensnare him at the beginning of what would be their fourth spar, but no this opportunity required patience. Patience never came well to Loki, Sesshomaru was much more apt to be patient than he.

Clint took off his shirt, revealing just a white sleeveless one underneath. He rolled his neck and jacked back his shoulders. His muscles flexed, he already sported a fine sheen of sweat. His hands were bound in bandages.

Loki magicked himself into black cotton pants, and a green sleeveless shirt respectively.
"Like I said, prepare to be impressed, I included some of my favorite artists on here, and some songs just to mess with you, Mischief God." Clint, bare feet padding almost silently across the hardwood floor, said his title mimicking the way Sesshomaru would say it. Clint did a fairly good Sho impression, and Loki would know considering he mimicked him.

Clint turned on the music system, and his playlist queued, starting with a song by a man named only letters: Kyoto by Skrillex feat. Sirah scrolled across the display.

And it began, and it was no dance. It was loosely contained chaos and fire. Loki felt the fight in air heavy like Clint had his own magic. Clint always started, Loki preferred to let his opponent go first. It naturally worked well, Loki preferred his opponents, along with his lovers, assertive. Clint came in hard and fast, matching the tempo of the strange electronic music. Clint opened with a left jab and Loki dodged artfully, shadowing him while aiming an elbow to the back of his head. Clint spun, aiming for a kidney punch which Loki blocked with his other hand.

'Born from the center of the storm, all the boys flappin' guns about how they're hard, bitch I'm harder.'

Skrillex's music struck him and anything but uninspired and stagnant, much like his sparring partner.

Loki relished it. He ducked and weaved, barely dodging Clint's surprisingly well-honed mixed martial art technique. If one were to think he was lacking in hand to hand combat due to his primary role as an archer, they would be sorely mistaken. Loki limited his power to that of a normal mortal, but with Clint he almost didn't need to.

'I suppose if I were to make a comparison, Clint would be if you spliced some Thor's fervor and brawn with some of Sho's grace and dexterity...with a bit of something else as well.' Loki appraised, blocking a right cross before swinging with his own right hook, it too being blocked by Clint's left arm.

Second song: All Day by Kanye West.

While dodging was more effective, the touch of skin on skin exhilarated Loki. The near miss brushes of knuckles on his side, the top of Clint's foot against his raised forearm blocking another roundhouse kick. The feel of the bottom of his own foot just barely kissing Clint's ribbed white shirt from a side kick. The feel of Clint's python strong grip on his wrist as he attempted to throw Loki over his shoulder. Loki broke his wrist lock with a quick counter.

'If you ain't with us, you in our way. You an actor, you should be on Broadway.'

Loki didn't know when he started smiling, or why he allowed himself the luxury, but he didn't care. Because this was going to be the closest he ever would ever get to Clint. Clint would never trust him, never like him. He didn't deserve it, really he didn't.

Did he want him anyway? Yes.

He wanted to tie him down and make him tremble, make him quake. Loki wanted to curve his tongue around him just like when he said the 'L' in his name. He wanted to take him in ways both new and old, he wanted to subject him to his arts most profane.

He wanted Clint to make him crawl, Loki longed for Clint to make him bend like a bow being strung. He needed him as a bright and scorching star to his dark and chilling vapor. He craved their bodies crashing, like an icy ocean wave on piping hot sand. He didn't expect it to ever happen. An
impossible outcome from a simple equation, but Loki hungered for him anyway. He savored tastes of what could have been.

The song changed to Kanye West: Stronger.

Loki danced right lifting his right leg vertically, aiming an axe kick to hit Clint on the crown of his head, but Clint flit back, countering with a front push kick that would have connected if Loki didn't twist out at the last possible second. Clint recovered and closed the gap with a foot sweep kick, an attempt to get Loki off balance aimed for his face. Loki switched his stance with a quick scissor of his legs and under his leg, hitting Clint in the side with his elbow, taking a right hook in his own side for the trouble.

Loki truly meant what he said when he first met Clint and said he had heart. He was drawn to him, and something deep within him, despite his mind tainted blue, despite the scepter's whispers and wires, knew he had to protect him. He had to ensure that Clint's mind would not end up as his, decayed and glazed over. He tinkered with the scepter, his first act of direct defiance of his forger.

He disguised a potent, intricate protection spell within the tap of the scepter when he touched Clint with it. A protection spell meant to bestow good fortune. That most any action he would take would have an outcome in his favor; it bent fate.

If a gun were aimed at Clint, it may jam, or the bullet wouldn't hit its desired target. It conjured small miracles, and preserved the person as they were, mind and body. The scepter's control of Clint remained only surface level, a miasma of blue fog clouding his mind. Loki knew the scepter's control of Clint would eventually break, and he would be returned to his normal, unaffected state.

'It would only take me touching the scepter again for me to retrograde back into the Other's weapon. For my mind to warp and erode once more. The sealing spell I placed on the scepter would have long sense faded. I am relieved to know the scepter has been destroyed, undoubtedly SHIELD must have dismantled it at the end of my reign of terror.' Loki's concentration drifted momentarily.

Clint connected with a left kidney punch and Loki rolled and unexpectedly caught Clint's eyes. His light brown eyes chided him for not paying due attention. He retaliated with a quick crescent kick, clipping Clint's ear.

New song: Power by Kanye West.

'Clint is getting most serious. Most likely irritated thinking my mind was elsewhere. That is our unspoken rule of Fight Club, your body and attention stayed on the fight. I'll accept his challenge and match his pace.' Loki settled into a taekwondo tiger stance, his left foot just in front of his right, fists at his sides. Loki preferred the fighting style of Taekwondo when unarmed due to lacking in upper body strength and the focus on kicks and elaborate ones at that.

Loki narrowed his gaze, and went on the offensive, misdirecting and spinning his body and planting his foot sideways, twisting his body horizontally in the air landing a blow on Clint's shoulder with a well-placed twisting butterfly kick. Clint struck back, angry, hitting Loki in the opposite side with a quick snap kick when he landed.

'I'm living' in that 21st century. Doing something mean to it. Do it better than anybody you ever seen do it. Screams from the haters, got a nice ring to it. I guess every superhero need his theme
They were beyond breaking a sweat. Their skin shone, their cheeks were flushed. Loki's long, dark and Clint's short brown hair hung damp.

New artist: Kid Ink's Bad Ass.

Loki dropped quick aiming to take out Clint's legs and to Loki's amusement it worked and down Clint fell. Clint grunted and flipped aiming a heel strike from his side which only met air.

They both sprang up quick in another flurry. Loki caught a glint of some something in his eye as Clint perfectly misdirected. He planted his hands on the ground sprung up into handstand and landed a flashy cartwheel kick right on Loki's head.

Loki crashed to the floor, dark spots dotting his vision. Loki fell for the first time in one of their spars, he held a hand to the right part of his forehead where the kick landed.

'I'm feeling like the man of the hour, tear down the house. Throwing this money like it's no running out.'

Clint recovered and paused, looking down at Loki, stunned and out of breath. A part of Loki believed Clint never thought that kick should have landed. Loki was on his back, his wet skin and shirt stuck to the cool floor. Loki knew how vulnerable he appeared as they locked eyes, chests heaving. He began to rock himself to get up when Clint offered his hand.

And as if on cue, the last song: Love Lockdown, by Kanye West

Loki's face slackened in disbelief as he grabbed it. Their slick hands together brought him back up. They were close again, and he still smelled like cotton, despite the sweat. Were they too close? Loki didn't care, this was his luxury, his indulgence. His soft hand, in Clint's worn one, their sweat melding them together, jolted Loki.

'See I wanna move, but can't escape from you. So I keep it low, keep a secret code. So everybody else don't have to know.'

"About time I landed a kick like that. You're all complicated kicks, had to try one myself." Clint breathed, letting go of his hand and turning off the music. Loki ran a hand back through his soaked hair, watching Clint with avid interest walk away from him, if someone were to liken him to a feline, then Clint embodied all hunter.

"Yes, well, it is to my advantage to favor kicks to punches. Strength has never been an advantage of mine like agility and flexibility are." Loki explained, unsure why he felt the need to go into detail about his fighting technique. He had supposed it had been a while since he sparred unarmed. Sesshomaru didn't particularly enjoy it, most likely because of his tournaments with Thor and his talons made it cumbersome.

"Eh, you're stronger than you look. Took me by surprise our first time fighting. What did you think?" Clint turned from the stereo system, all broad strokes of muscles and beads of sweat. Loki couldn't get lock on Clint, he kept complimenting him in ways he couldn't acknowledge and followed them up with questions or statements that changed the subject.

Clint Barton, a slippery adversary indeed, Loki licked his lips, tasting salt. He approached Clint with brazen swagger, feeling his black pants stick to his thighs, quads and hamstrings damply.

"Ah, I was quite dazzled." Loki refused to elaborate further. Delighting in being purposely vague,
translucent green eyes alight in adrenaline and thirst. Like a jaguar he watched Clint's face flicker into a slight satisfaction, surprising Loki. He wanted to take Clint off guard, not have Clint react this way, he wanted Clint to pick up on his seductive intentions and falter due to it.

"Sweet. No one else here listens to him. I'll include some more of his stuff for next time." Clint smiled softly and took his phone from the sound system. Loki frowned in suspicion, could Clint be blind to his blatant flirtations or inviting him to go further?

Jubilant, Loki decided on the latter, mostly due to it amusing him more.

"Three years ago…" Clint started and Loki immediately tensed. His magic circled inside him like vultures. Loki locked eyes with Clint, pursing his lips thin. "You fought back against them, outsmarted them, and you won." Clint finished and Loki squinted in confusion. Won? A truly strange way to see it. Was Clint complimenting him or something else?

"One does not win a game they were never a player in. You and your Avengers won, you stopped the Mad Titan. You all prevented the Tesseract from falling into the Mad Titan's grasp." Loki crossed his arms to guard his hesitancy in his answer.

Loki noticed Clint clenched his jaw in irritation. Why he wasn't sure. He had actually been honest in that reply.

Loki was not being humble, or vying for compliments like he sometimes would with that answer. He was never a true participant, but the element of entropy. He was a maelstrom of chaos that simply blew up in the hand of his wielder, giving the lost creatures ample opportunity for victory.

"Do you… forget it. It's not impor—" Loki saw his chance and closed the gap between them, he stood in front of Clint, all sure intensity and coy smirks.

He rose his arm and placed, not poked, Clint on his damp chest, lingering briefly on the curled, wet chest hair beneath his tank top.

"You do not ask unimportant questions. What do you wish to know?" Loki, ardently curious rolled his shoulders back to ready himself to answer his question.

By nature, Loki liked to push his limits, to step over the line, yet just because he insisted that Clint ask his question didn't mean he would necessarily answer it honestly.

If it would benefit him or Clint to answer it honestly he would, but he would easily, and proudly lie to Clint if Loki thought it best.

"Do you think you're still at fault? Did you forget that I was your second in command? Everything you did brought the Avengers together, aside from Fury originally working on the Tesseract. If you thought you weren't a participant in the outcome then what does that make me? We were both controlled by them, we were both manipulated and had our minds played with." Loki really should have seen Clint's response coming. He should have anticipated that Clint, logically, would think that they were in the same circumstances.

He really shouldn't have gotten angry. But now anger was second nature to him, much like their Berserker. He bristled and backed up from Clint, fists clenched, jaw high and arrogant. His magic coiled.

"Clint, I set into motion a series of events that could cleave the galaxy in two. Do not mistake me for one of your altruistic Avengers. Do not mistake that the scepter's control over you and the Other's ownership of my mind were equivalent. Do not mistake yourself to be anything near as
disgraceful as I." Loki hissed and teleported out of the gym in a flash of green smoke leaving Clint alone and perturbed, again.

Chapter End Notes

eeeeeek, this turned out a lot different than I expected!!! But I am pretty happy with it. Thanks for reading, let me know how you liked it!

-TL
Clint and the Potato Salad

Chapter Notes

**fair warning, this is a bit of an AU fic, I will have some 'creative licensing' with Clint's back story. If you have any constructive input into it, please let me know. However, I do know it will not be what is usually considered comic nor movie universe accurate, so please no flames regarding this.

Clint and the Potato Salad

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"Damn, he is such a drama queen. I told him to forget the question, but no, he wanted to know! And, of course, when he didn't like it he got all bent out of shape. Hadn't he ever heard be careful what you wish for?! He could be on Broadway or something, I swear. 'cleave the galaxy in two… anything as disgraceful as I'…Loki needs to build a Bifrost and get over himself." Clint muttered to himself as he peeled his sour smelling, sweat soaked clothes from his body.

His chest was taut, like tangled strings had constricted around his lungs. Maybe he felt a little guilty for alarming the Demi-God.

Clint sighed. He had no idea how to handle his life now. He turned on the shower and waited for the water to get hot.

In fact, there was literally no doubt in his mind he was in completely over his head. The whole week had been like playing Nat in Mario Cart and continuously hitting hit by shells and falling off rainbow road. He had never felt more turned around in his life.

He had been enjoying the quiet SHIELD non-Avengers life for the past almost three years. He mostly, kind of, moved on with the whole Chitauri invasion thing. He got assigned normal, non mind-bendy assignments, accomplished them, got paid, rinse and repeat. Speaking of rinse, the shower water finally got warm enough for him to get underneath.

He had time to be a good uncle to his niece and nephew back in Iowa. He was acclimating. Well, as well as a trained assassin could to a normal life when he had been mind controlled by a Demi-God.

'I was kicking ass and taking names, just like Clint Barton should. Does!' Clint began to wash his hair, feeling the salty sweat begin to dislodge and soften.

Now it'd all started back up again, and he had to relive it all. Loki included. Definitely Loki included. Loki demanded his attention, like a super-diva of their demented little soap opera.

He and his aloof best friend, Fancy Pants, had the Avengers wrapped up in their ridiculous bromance, and all the chaos that followed it. He thought if Loki were to be friends with anyone, and that was a precarious possibility in of itself, he thought that his best friend would be someone equally theatrical and over the top. Yet, if Loki was a technicolor epileptic mess, Sesshomaru was a black and white photograph.
Sesshomaru was certainly a solid dampener on Loki's melodramatic behavior, which Clint greatly appreciated.

'Good job Clint, way to be bros with SHIELD's top criminal's best friend. It's not like wasn't hard enough to gain back even a little of Fury's trust.' Clint knew he was probably supposed to dislike the Demon Lord, but he didn't. He liked the guy even though he and Loki had been almost uncomfortably close since, well, Gods knew when.

'Those two together looked like they could probably take on the solar system for shits and giggles then cheers over it. Whoever this Thermos was chose the wrong God to mess with. Hell, he chose the wrong planet to mess with. While I've had never seen Loki and Sesshomaru fight together, my jaw dropped witnessing their light spar. It was a flat out different breed of fighting than I saw from Loki before.' Clint scowled to himself, slightly embarrassed he had so grossly underestimated Loki's fighting capabilities, then grabbed the soap.

A flash of an image of Loki standing over him after their first spar, tall, wet, dark, and green. His smug smirk, his long legs, his fair skin taunted him. Ugh. Clint massaged his swollen muscles in the shower with the soap, while he through the week chronologically.

The first, extremely unexpected confrontation with Sesshomaru felt so long ago already. He remembered the lover comment like it was yesterday however.

He, Clint Barton, being Loki's lover?! A snowball's chance in hell. That was absurd. One, he was straight, two...seriously the guy who ruined his life?! He convinced himself he was going to hate Fancy Pants after that. This silver haired samurai, who flung Tony into him, which had left a few nasty bruises, had to be trying to get a rise out of him.

Yet as time went on, Clint realized that Sesshomaru didn't want to get a rise out of anyone, except maybe Tony. Watching the Demon Lord turn Tony inside out tickled Clint since Tony likened himself to having the quickest wit.

'"That stupid question game? Catching Tony's roof on fire? It was like this guy was tailor made to get under Tony's skin. It was better than pay-per-view. To top it off; Fancy Pants, irritatingly so, proved himself a decent guy. Never thought I'd say that about someone who went "treasure questing" with Loki. He made it sound like he and Loki would just roam around and go on adventures all the time like the Boy Scouts. I have to bring up the purple stag thing when the time is right.' Clint soaped up, knowing now the sour grime of sweat was sloughing off him.

And then the shape-shifting Fury fiasco happened. To think if he hadn't been examining at 'Fancy Pants' at just the right moment, and spotted his hands being different they would have never caught on.

He had no idea what the blue spot on his hand meant though. Maybe it was a side effect of the shape shifting?

Only Fancy Pants, of all the people in the room, including Nat, told him to shoot Loki. Clint never, in a million years, expected that. He still remembered his cold yellow eyes as he bit out that it was a request, not a challenge. Clint caught Sesshomaru's fuming anger hidden deep in him, almost like he felt personally betrayed.

Clearly, Sesshomaru thought better of Loki. Well, Clint couldn't really blame him for that since he knew apparently, a very different Loki.

This Demon Lord, whip and all, who would probably be Loki's best man at Loki's wedding over
Thor (if Fancy Pants didn't marry Loki, himself), understood what Clint was trying to do. And he only knew about it for two seconds. While his fellow Avengers, who knew the whole story for years, studied him like a deranged serial killer.

Clint, for the first time since the incident, bloomed with vindication. Someone finally got it. Sesshomaru understood that it wasn't about hate or revenge, but about principles, about things that people were supposed to uphold, like honor.

Maybe Cap wasn't the only one who was a bit old fashioned.

'I wanted my honor back. I wanted SHIELD to stop treating me with shadowy distrust, even after having to earn back everything after I am still considered by them as potentially compromised. They ran countless tests on me, and the scepter three years ago to see if I could go back to being under its control and nothing came out conclusive.' Clint remembered all his wasted weekends grimly. He let some water from the shower catch in his mouth and spit it out hard against the tile.

'Nat told me that Fury referred to me as a 'flying monkey' when under Loki's control. Really? A flying monkey who still managed to outsmart and outthink you? Is that what you truly thought of me Fury? Maybe he still thinks I could be one. Sometimes I don't even know why I bother, except If I don't step up and get off my ass who will?' Clint grimaced, massaging his shoulder that would certainly bruise from Loki's butterfly kick.

He was never compromised; he was dishonored, and Sesshomaru got it. Clint rinsed for probably longer than necessary, and turned off the water.

And yet his fellow Avengers, save maybe Bruce, didn't back him on wanting some retribution. Steve looked at him like he was shooting a puppy. Thor looked like he wanted to break his bow hand. Even Nat wanted him to think of the bigger picture. He wasn't really sure what Tony thought but he seemed distracted by Fancy Pants going postal on his roof.

Clint didn't kid himself, he knew Fancy Pants didn't say it because he liked him, but all the more better. He got that some people do things that deserved justice regardless of your friendship to them.

He trusted in Sesshomaru's impartiality. At that moment in the room, Clint understood where Sesshomaru drew the line between loyalty and integrity. Clint could trust if Loki ever faltered, Sesshomaru would help them immediately put him in his place, maybe even quicker than Thor.

'It was then I began to respect the guy. Respect Loki's best friend! Who would have bet on that?' Clint laughed at himself as he got out of the shower and found a towel, remembering how Sesshomaru strode from the living room flicking down his aviators like that guy from CSI Miami.

During the scrying thing he saw how much Loki cared about Fancy Pants.

It disturbed him so much his toes curled in his boots.

He didn't want Loki to care about anyone, especially someone he actually respected! Loki was the villain! He destroyed his career! His reputation!

Clint truly wanted things to be simple. Life was easier when and dry, black and white, no gray, so seeing Loki's face twist into such a frenzied panic really floored him. His image that he had painted in his mind of what Loki represented, of Loki's character, began to show its bias.

Clint liked to see himself as a practical surveyor and voice of reason, so he had to begin to question his own prejudice viewing Loki.
'Loki has someone he cares a lot about, a single father who upholds similar beliefs I do. Loki holds such devotion to Fancy Pants that he flat out ignored all the arrows I stuck him with and ran up to the whirling tornado to try to free him, to try to snap him out of it. Instead, the tornado threw him aside, his hands bleeding, frantic, and dark hair swirling.' Clint remembered, toweling himself dry, waiting for the mirror to defog.

Loki had someone he cared enough to risk his life for, and that went against everything he thought he knew about the God. He only seemed out for himself when he spent time with him on Earth three years ago. Yet he only began to brutally rip the arrows out of himself, to call Toady and Rin to come up to the roof with his magic.

The same arrows Loki welcomed willingly without flinching once. Clint, afterwards, expected to feel the entirely of a world of weight lift off his shoulders, the sweet taste of victory tingling his taste buds. In the end, it felt strangely bland. Clint wanted Loki to balk, to try to silver-tongue or cajole his way out of it, but he didn't. And, at the time he didn't see it, but now having all the facts, Clint can verify that Loki felt genuine and gaping remorse.

Clint wouldn't ever apologize for what he did, but damn looking back on it, it now looked like such a pyrrhic victory. And that next morning he had to go face the people, who he thought were his friends, interrogate him and Nat.

All the scrutiny, the uneasy stares, the neuro tests, the upped security measures just rendered him raw and angry. The weighed words, even Coulson regarded him with a grey uneasiness.

In fact, during the entire time he and Nat had reported into SHIELD, Coulson's eyes scorched a hole in the back of his head, like he was again some potential threat.

Like he would help destroy a world that his family and friends lived in. Like he wanted to do it the first time.

Clint knew Coulson had an axe to grind with Loki, and Hill had no love lost for him either, but he honestly didn't expect to have their suspicion of foul-play taken out on him. Fury, sure, them no. It just pushed him over the edge.

He recalled a previous conversation with Coulson and Hill after one of his neuro-exams this past week.

"How you feeling Barton?" Hill asked smoothly and he really wished that she had sounded normal and neutral like always. But she didn't. She sounded a little soft and he knew she was trying to manipulating him.

"Like I just got back from a nice relaxing day at the spa. I should have asked the brain electrode guy for a mani-pedi. A guy can never feel too pampered." Clint half sneered with a voice like fake sugar. Hill dropped the act.

Damn, where is Nat?

"It's nothing personal. We can't leave anything to chance. One moment we have Loki's magic signature on your flight to New York then it disappears almost right after the jet lands. These precautions a—" Clint had enough and cut Hill off.

"Nothing personal, you know people only say that when it is right? It's sort of like the phrase 'No
"Barton. Loki is a dangerous, highly intelligent, and manipulative Demi-God. If he is back, we have to make sure to ensure that what he attempted three years ago doesn't happen again. If that Demon really is Loki, he could try to compromise you and Dr. Selvig again." Hill expounded like she was in a mission debrief and Clint's vision flashed with sudden rage.

He had to pull every lie busting training tactic for Hill, Coulson, and Fury to not pick up that he knew about Loki. He passed, of course, but it didn't lessen their suspicion of him. It of course didn't let them see him as Agent Clint Barton, and not 'Loki's flying monkey'. This was all Loki's fault. Really. If only that mysterious, dark god never stepped out of that damn portal and made him into some henchman in a bad action movie. If only he hadn't been dishonored by him.

Nat still wasn't here. He could really use her help right now.

Maybe he should just tell them all about Loki. Or maybe he could hit Loki where it would hurt most.

An arrow right through his friend's blue moon tattoo.

"Dishonored. Not. Compromised. And again for the oh I don't know, thousandth time, the Demon is real. He lit a fire on Tony's roof and killed a deer. Think Loki would do something like that? I don't know if there is anything I can do anymore to convince you that I'm not Loki's lap dog and I'm done trying." Clint leaned back and crossed his arms, muscles flexing as if daring Hill for a retort.

"Barton. If Loki is here we will find him, and we will put a stop to him, and whatever he has planned." Coulson's voice slapped Clint like a wet towel. If only they knew what supposedly Loki was really up to. Clint also didn't miss how he was called Barton and not Clint by someone he considered a friend.

Actually, only Nat called him Clint nowadays. They really didn't see him as a friend anymore.

"Well, Phil, happy hunting to you and Maria. Count me out of the wild goose, or should I say wild God chase." He made sure to use their first names. They didn't visually scowl back but he knew he made his point.

Loki had cost him everything.

His whole life he strove to be the person you could count on to make the right call. To have unclouded vision, to see the right course of action and follow through seamlessly. Just like when he left home so his family would have one less mouth to feed and joined the circus to send money home to support his family when no other jobs could be had in their drugged out town.

Everyone still second-guessed him. Just shooting Loki a few times wasn't enough. It was time for him to feel as isolated as he did.

The need to do to Loki what he did to him overrode everything. Losing his friendships at SHIELD made him see red because he sacrificed a normal, simple life for them and he got this in return.

He could have built a house like his kid brother did. He could've settled down with a wife, had
some kids, teach them hockey, how to bow hunt. But no, he sacrificed all that and all he got suspicion and rejection in return for something he couldn't control.

'But damn, I went absolute straight-jacket status in the Quinjet. Nat had every reason to rough me up and tell everyone about what I almost did, but she didn't. Probably a good thing, if I went through with it, Loki probably would have turned Stark Tower to ash.' Clint realized, looking back, it was a colossally bad idea.

He liked Sesshomaru, but people hurt people they like all the time.

He really wasn't himself after he had gotten back from seeing Fury. Fury eyed only him, seeing if he was hiding something, any scrap of evidence that Fancy Pants was anyone other than who he was. Clint even told Fury his eyes weren't blue and to stop acting like they were.

Fury never really suspected Nat, who, ironically, planned most of the scheme. Clint found his razor and his shaving cream and started to shave.

'After getting the quick and dirty recap from Tony and seeing him dressed up like Sesshomaru with matching face tattoos, which I now have photographic evidence of thanks to Bruce and Nat, I thought there couldn't be any more surprises thrown my way. Nope. Totally wrong. The icy gut punch of irony just sucker me good. To think Loki was a puppet too.' Clint carefully shaved around his Adam's apple, he should probably change out the blades for newer, sharper ones.

Clint remembered, despite the scepter, disagreeing with some of Loki's tactical choices. He remembered not understanding Stuttgart entirely. Yes he needed a distraction, but didn't need Loki to act out in that way. An explosion would have sufficed and allowed them to retreat. And yes, he needed the eyeball, but he also didn't have to extract the eyeball from the guy either. He also didn't agree with Loki's imprisonment on the helicarrier, it was an unnecessary risk for the invasion. It was all wrong, it got the Avengers together, not disband, and shatter them. It even got him thinking clearly, out of the scepter's control!

Loki wasn't a vicious, high-strung, lunatic; he acted that way on purpose. And not because he was bribed to be one.

Clint cursed, nicking himself shaving. He knew he should have changed out the blades. Loki would probably be laughing at him right now if he saw him. His mind flashed to Loki on his back on the floor of the gym, briefly stunned. his chest heaved under his damp shirt, strong jaw slackened in shock.

Loki looked human. Like he could actually hurt Loki.

And he did, in a sense. He had royally offended him somehow when all he really meant was to say that three years ago Loki had well, pulled off the impossible. Because, Clint figured, if the Other and Thermos figured out he double crossed them they would have gone through the portal first.

That wouldn't have been good. They barely held off the Chitauri. Guilt scratched the back of Clint's throat. Loki being mad at him was really one of the last things he wanted since he clearly had just started to balance himself out.

Loki.

They tortured him, the Other and that Titan tortured Loki, God of Mischief. Clint recalled how he shot to his feet when Sesshomaru answered his question, and subsequently, sparked his panic attack.
How could he have not seen it? He was his right hand man for the entire damn invasion and he had no clue. He knew Loki could lie, he just didn't think he hid anything from him while leading the invasion. He hid a lot.

Clint managed to find a bit of tissue to put on the bleeding cut on his jaw.

Loki failed the invasion not only to spit in the Other's eye, but to save a planet he didn't even live on! And then went back to Asgard for seconds! All so that his family, his people, would believe him that the worst had yet to come; he just merely delayed the inevitable.

He stayed in Asgard getting his head bashed in atonement to regain enough trust to save both Earth and his home. And no one believed him, no one bothered to trust him.

He had to trick his own father about a mythical sword, risking his best friend's life, not only bringing him to this time, but also trusting that he didn't kill us, or we him.

Clint hated the logic behind it, because he had wanted to hate Loki so much. It was what he did, it was what he was comfortable with. It's what he had been doing.

But all along Loki wanted what he wanted: to get his honor back.

He remembered Loki's choked words. He had heard them before, from the scepter. He didn't know what they meant when he was being controlled, but now he did. Forger is what scepter went by, Broken Blade is what he called Loki. Loki had been directed the whole time.

'The Scepter may have shrouded my mind, but the Other apparently did something else to Loki's. You can't fake that desperate tone of voice, that crazy tree magic, that wild, cornered wave of agony.' Clint could affirmatively say Loki unraveled, and Sesshomaru aimed to murder. Clint ran some gel through his hair, it always got fluffy otherwise.

"I existed once. I truly did. You know that." Clint heard himself whisper the words Loki only meant for Sesshomaru, his voice had cut deep like a chasm. Those words still echoed in Clint when rooms, like this one, were quiet and still. Clint tugged on his purple Ducati shirt and found some baggy, torn jeans and slipped those on over his boxers.

'I don't know what possessed me to go up to the sofa, behind Tony, and call your name. You didn't hear me, didn't see me, but I wanted you to.' He swiped on deodorant and a little aftershave, avoiding the cut and sprayed on Armani Code, and made his way to the kitchen.

In all, this whole debacle that Loki had currently made his life into could have gone sideways so many different ways, but that only showed how hopeless Loki felt. How much Loki needed someone to trust him, to listen to him.

'Who actually does listen to him besides Sesshomaru? How much do we even really know about Loki? How much does he really lie? How does someone like the 'I'm suspicious of everyone' Demon Lord get to trust Loki when no one else supposedly does? How deep does this rabbit hole really go?' Unfortunately, he could relate to not being trusted. He hated thinking of questions he'd probably eventually get the answers to, and not like.

He entered the bustling, lively kitchenette that comprised Stark Tower.

Everyone was prepping for, as Tony called it, 'crabpocalypse'. He saw that Sesshomaru looked way better. Just because you had a break down didn't mean you thrashed your friends, Loki had to work on that. But like he was one to talk...
'That stupid tricky cartwheel kick he landed was a little bit also payback for what Loki did to you, in addition to showing Loki he isn't the only one who can be flashy.' Clint grinned to himself, still stoked he landed the kick. They weren't easy to land. It was fortunate Loki was so hard headed since they resulted in a lot of knock outs.

Clint liked to think that Sesshomaru saw the venison as a peace offering following the Quinjet incident. After learning he was a Dog Demon, and receiving his scathing, glacial death-stare he gave him on the helipad, Clint knew Fancy Pants heard what he attempted. He knew a thing about having enhanced senses.

"Hey Legolas! Come help with me with the potato salad...I don't know what I'm doing and Pepper refuses to help." Tony sounded petulant like a teenager. He leaned against the counter next to the potato salad bowl, drink in hand, scowling at the bowl like an unsolvable problem.

"Tony. It's potato salad. Please." Pepper protested, rolling her blue eyes. She was holding a vanilla ice cream cone in one hand, and a butter pecan cone in the other. Clint would bet his best bow the butter pecan was Steve's who had his hands full. Always old fashioned. Clint made his way to a way out of his depth Tony Stark.

"So you can make an arc reactor and Iron Man suits, but not potato salad?" Clint began to chop up the rest of the potatoes with practiced ease.

"I'm an inventor, genius, playboy, and Iron Man. Potato salad doesn't really fit into my brand." Clint snickered. Brand?

"What the infamous Tony Stark can't learn something new?" Steve announced pulling his cheese biscuits from the oven, wearing an apron and hot mitts. Man Steve, you are so lucky your biceps are as large as my legs or the Suzy homemaker jokes...

"Ok Captain Pillsbury, please explain how making potato salad can possibly improve the perfection that is me." Tony mocked, pushing the bowl towards Clint as if it was a bomb.

"Women love a man who can cook!" Steve retorted and Clint tossed a cube of potato at Steve's chest. It landed perfectly in the pocket of his apron. Natasha laughed, rinsing grapes in one hand, in the other a strawberry ice cream cone. Steve could only shrug.

"Cooking skills are pretty low priority for the people I seduce. And what you're doing isn't cooking, it's baking, Captain Betty Crocker." Tony responded, and Clint noticed Tony's quick dart of a look Fancy Pants' direction who either ignored it or didn't notice.

Clint went with ignored. Not much got past the calculating Demon Lord. It also didn't get past Clint that Fancy Pants ate all his food practically raw....

"Hello Barton! I got you some ice cream! It's mint chocolate chip! Lord Sesshomaru said you like green too! Hurry it's melting!" Clint looked down at Rin who held held up a cone. Her brown eyes shown big and hair was brushed and shiny.

'Rin is a cute kid, she is just a bit older than my niece, Chloe. Maybe one day they'll meet. I actually hung up my picture Rin drew me. It's awesome. It's me firing arrows at a huge dragon.' Clint gave her a warm thumbs up and Rin's round face practically sprouted joy.

"Thanks munchkin! Wait! What since when do you speak English?!" Clint jumped and Rin laughed, everyone else in the room was smiling like they were in on an inside joke.

Of course he was last on the uptake.
"Uncle Loki made me this necklace that makes what I say understood by you! Stark made me this ear device so I can understand you! It's called the 'Com-rin-icator' High five!" Rin threw her hand up and Clint high fived it. Rin giggled and ran. 'Uncle Loki huh? The munchkin loves the guy.' Clint continued to chop up some hardboiled eggs that Tony somehow managed to figure out to make.

Actually no, he probably roped Steve or Bruce into making them.

"Really Tony? That's actually really great of you!" Steve commended, Clint caught the note of intentional disbelief.

"Well I must admit, I, Tony Stark, bartered." Clint saw Tony turn back to Sesshomaru who nodded and Clint swore he saw his ears move. Sesshomaru simply stood in the middle of the fray, just like the ringleader of a circus.

Clint wondered why he bothered positioning himself in the middle of everything when he was really more of a periphery kind of guy. Clint monitored the Demon Lord, he didn't like being in the middle of anything, much like himself.

They had a few things in common.

He savored his ice cream as Loki sauntered into the room, wearing his typical get up, tight black leather pants and emerald v-neck shirt. His hair was washed, gelled, and pushed back straight. Rin plowed into him and Loki stumbled back and smiled widely. He certainly acted like an uncle to Rin, but to himself something else.

Clint remembered their conversation in the dark early this morning.

Loki's hips swayed and his shoulders rolled like a Tango dancer to a slow rhythmic beat. His presumptuous green eyes flared with magic, because no human eyes could possibly gleam that bright. Carnivorous and sly, Loki was all jungle, his body undulated and lips hinted at a vague threat or cavernous hunger.

Clint, being a hunter, easily identified the signals Loki relayed to him. Loki beckoned him with cunning quips and a familiarity he didn't feel he deserved. Clint had to say it puzzled him why Loki would play such games, but it was Loki after all. He must look to get a certain reaction of anyone.

He refused to remember how his body language made him swallow and his skin rush with heat. He wasn't used to such undiluted and brash scrutiny.

'And a week ago I hated this guy more than anything. Now what? You've gotten yourself into a mess Clint, a big complicated, confusing mess with the God of Mischief. What are you thinking?!' Clint ate more of his rich, albeit small ice cream cone while one-handedly adding in the chopped potatoes and eggs into the bowl.

'Mint chocolate chip isn't my favorite but it's pretty good. Why she said Fancy Pants thinks I'd like green is beyond me. I mean, I'm wearing purple, you'd think if he thought I liked green I'd be wearing it...wait. Nooooo." He slowly turned around to a suspiciously still Sesshomaru watching him, stoic as ever. His gold eyes sliced into him with an intensity that could cleave marble.

'That meddling bastard! He can't possibly still be serious!' Clint stole another glance to Loki. Loki merely donned a mocking smile and pointed to his chin.

The razor nick! Blasted Loki! He threw off the small bit of tissue off his jaw and into the trash. He then picked up a chunk of celery and threw it behind him right at Sesshomaru. He snatched it right
before it hit him on his gaudy blue moon.

He stared at Sesshomaru, putting two fingers to his eyes then pointing to Sesshomaru, who merely blinked slowly.

"One day I'll surprise him." Clint vowed to himself.

"Crafty, delusional, Demon Lord, smug, know-it all Demi-God. You two should have never been allowed to be friends." Clint set his jaw hard at Sesshomaru who simply stared back. He heard Loki's dark, dry laugh.

This. This was his life, making potato salad in a billionaire's kitchen for two Demi-Gods, a Demon Lord, oh and don't forget the Hulk!

"...Rivendell to Legolas! Get the mustard!" Tony waved his hand in front of Clint's face and he jolted grabbing the Dijon. Tony so knew how to make potato salad; he just didn't want to it. Figures.

He heard Sesshomaru leave the kitchen like his work was done. Damn. He turned back to the potato salad, stirring the in the Dijon. He wondered if Loki had been mocking him over his music selection for their Fight Club. The Skrillex song was meant as a joke, being that Nat called him Glow Stick.

"Ah, I was quite dazzled." What an arrogant God! What was that supposed to mean?!

The Kanye music was an inside joke. Kanye West, though a talented musical artist, had an ego that could rival Loki's. Yet if you really listened to his albums, he had good chunk of self-depreciation about himself as well. If Loki became a fan of his music it would just be too perfect.

He and Nat would have material to laugh at for days. Though he should definitely remove 'Love Lockdown' from the playlist though, what an awkward song to end a spar on.

Nothing like pulling another sweaty, toned guy off the floor to the lyrics "I'm not loving you, the way I wanted to. What I had to do, had to run from you." Clint glanced up, searching the room for Loki, frowning noticing he had left.

Irritable God. He could just take it out his issues on him in their next Fight Club. He wouldn't let him out of their spars easily.

"Maybe I'll replace it with Runaway, or some EDM song." He finished the first potato salad Tony ever attempted to make without any further distraction just as the last member of the dinner party arrived.

"Rhodey! How's life?!" Tony hugged Rhodey and put an arm around him, showing him his newest gadget thing and handing him a beer. They chatted and meandered to Pepper who was standing near the table.

They had to cobble together a bunch of crazy mismatched furniture to make their Crapocalypse dinner of one dozen happen. Clint also imagined that Loki may have conjured some furniture together as some of the chairs were his preferred shade of green.

It agitated him he knew his preferred shade of green.

It didn't occur to Clint, until after he grabbed his Heineken, also green, from the fridge, that the only open seat at the table was across from Loki.
Loki had also decided to sit at the very end, next to Sesshomaru, and of course across from Sesshomaru sat Tony. Tony couldn't let the poor Demon Lord get away with one meal without harassment.

Their current seating arrangement left his talking options to Tony, who would have his attentions on Rhodsey to his left, a Demon Lord who averaged three words an hour, and the God of Mischief. Sesshomaru arranged this on purpose.

'Oh. This game in on! I'm gonna act like nothing is off, gonna get Fancy Pants back for this one.' Clint vowed at least he got his choice of crab cakes. He made his way to the table, double fisting ice cream and beer, and sat in front of the Loki who's forehead wrinkled in legitimate shock seeing him there.

Clint's cheeks flushed scarlet and he sucked his teeth. He watched Loki, high cheekbones and all, turn next to him at Fancy Pants, and drum his fingers on the table. Clint decided to do the same. Solidarity.

Sesshomaru just calmly passed the crabcakes to Clint, as if nothing was up. Clint picked up the tongs and picked his choice, spotting that the Demon Lord did in fact had the practically raw venison cut into small pieces on his plate. Success there.

Returning the tongs, Clint grabbed the fruit salad bowl as Loki quickly morphed into his Japanese form before Rhodes took his seat next to Tony. Clint totally forgot that the whole point of this was to bring Rhodes on board. He, of course, wouldn't be used to seeing Loki enjoying the damn crabcakes like a Food Network Star across the table.

'Yet, since when do I find it normal that Loki eats with us? I mean, it's a bit strange Fancy Pants still thinks we are lovers, but other than that...it feels like one big dysfunctional family. Seriously dysfunctional. Key word dysfunctional.' Clint spooned grapes, blueberries, pineapple and apples, avoiding the cantaloupe, onto his plate. Cantaloupe grossed him out.

Probably because one of his circus tricks was having them launch cantaloupes with faces painted on them and he, blindfolded, would shoot them with flaming arrows.

He would do it with other smaller fruit too but the cantaloupes always kind of looked like heads and when they'd burst open they stank sickly sweet. The complete opposite of what a split open human head really smelled like.

"So Tony, who are your new friends?" Clint stiffened reflexively. Loki sliced a gaze across the table and Sesshomaru just tilted his head, lips drawing into a slight frown.

"Ah, Colonel Rhodes, they are guests of mine! Son of Taisho provided the ocean scuttlers you are consuming!" Thank you Thor for the save. Thor beamed like a bonfire from Rin's right. She also adored Thor, who she of course called 'Storm God.'

Clint couldn't see Rhodes' reaction but he did see Tony relax and take a drink of his… gin and tonic?! Was he out of scotch?

"Ah, it's been a while since we've seen others from Asgard—" Rhodes started and Jaken interrupted.

"My Lord and I are not from the distant realm, bothersome human!" Jaken interrupted and ate a shrimp. Rhodes just turned to Tony with a perplexed look twisted on his face. Clint also forgot that not many people would be used to a two-foot tall green Demon with a superiority complex belittle
an Air Force Colonel.

"Yeah, ignore Snarf. He and the rest of Thundercats still got bifrost jet-lag." Tony smirked and turned to Sesshomaru who just continued to stare at Clint deadpan.

Clint was sure it bothered Tony, since he obviously baited Sesshomaru and it didn't work. Clint wished he did get baited; Fancy Pants was weirding him out.

"What? Do I have something on my face Fancy Pants? Maybe a moon?" Clint tried to shake Fancy Pants' gaze and he got him to furrow his eyebrows and take a sip of his red wine at least.

"Uh, yeah ok. So, Tony, how goes the experiment on the… " Clint zoned out of Rhodes' question to Tony, who continued to scowl at the Demon Lord.

Clint hadn't noticed that his ice cream had melted down to his hand till Loki cleared his throat.

"Didn't know you to be so inattentive to your surroundings, Clint." Loki flashed his teeth in amusement, clearly the God had been waiting to say something until the opportune moment.

Clint cursed and instinctively switched the cone to his left hand and licked the melted ice cream off his right. The mint ice cream now warm and sticky on his hand, licking it didn't really do the trick.

"Says the guy who I kicked in the head and laid out?" Clint fired back, without malice.

Loki merely sighed and grabbed his cloth napkin, dipping it in ice water, and took Clint's right hand in his. Loki wiped Clint's hand clean with a soft grace and Clint, stunned, just froze there, still as stone.

'Ok. This is definitely not normal; this is definitely new territory. Is he seriously treating me like a kid? It reminded him of when he was new to the circus he joined and everyone watched over him like they would a kid brother. He was the middle child in his family, not the youngest, thank you very much.

Yet, Clint didn't dare move his hand. The last thing he wanted was Tony turning and noticing what was happening. Clint already felt Fancy Pants' slit pupiled eyes scalding a hole through his hand. A hand currently being caressed by a very mischievous God.

"Thanks, I am not a kid, I am completely capable of cleaning up my own messes." Clint finally retracted his hand only after Loki cleaned it. Clint attempted to eat his ice cream cone hastily. He caught Loki's now brown eyes smoldering.

"You are far from a child, I never meant to imply anything of the sort. I just merely offered assistance where needed." Clint tried to look Loki in the eyes, but it grated on him out that Loki didn't look like Loki, but still sounded like him. He opted for staring at a bit of apple on Loki's plate instead.

'Wish he could just look like himself. I meant what I said in the kitchen earlier this morning before dawn. Loki should just stay Loki; the shapeshifting throws me off. I don't like it.' Clint's mouth tugged into a small frown as he picked up his beer in his now clean right hand.

"Yeah, well, it's what parents do with their kids or what…" Clint's eyes widened in realization that he was about to say: 'what lovers do' and knew he had to immediately turn his attention from Loki. He turned to see Sesshomaru regarding him with a bit of humor.

'Stop. Staring. At. Me.' Clint ran his tongue over his teeth in frustration. Sesshomaru, obviously,
didn't stop staring.

Clint instead of taking a swig from his beer in his right hand, he took a large bite from his ice cream cone and recoiled from the brain freeze and unexpected sweetness. This was just not Clint's dinner.

Loki snorted and his now brown eyes crinkled, running a hand through his now shorter hair. Clint licked his lips, now taking a big gulp from his Heineken, putting it back down, picking up his fork to attack his crabcakes before they cooled.

"Were you going to finish your thought?" Loki prompted darkly, taking a sip from his red wine, probably Chiraz, it's what he drank at the Steakhouse. Wait, why did he remember that?

"You know; why don't you finish it for me Lo-Yuki?" Clint had no idea what made him say that at all. He also almost blew his cover.

Clint's humor thrived on sarcasm, not verbal wit games. He just challenged the God of Lies to a game of wit. 'Good job Clint, just hand me a shovel so I can keep on digging.' Clint put a forkful of crabcake into his mouth. Loki took another sip of wine. That particular exchange made Clint feel like he was roped into some blind date. He shook the thought from his head and focused on the food.

'Man these are slammin. Good call Fancy Pants. These were probably just as good, or better than the venison I got him.' Clint stole a look over to Fancy Pants who, for once didn't stare at him, but seemed completely zoned out, even for him, staring down at his plate.

A plate of almost completely untouched venison, prepared blue probably how he liked it.

'Damn, maybe I was wrong, maybe he is more of a porterhouse kind of guy. Though he hasn't said a word all evening, and while he isn't exactly a 'Chatty Kathy', thank god we have enough of those, this is unusual. He and Loki haven't talked about anything, and Tony is busy with Rhodes. Is it possible for Fancy Pants to feel left out? Eh, unlikely, Sesshomaru could command one hundred and ten percent of Tony's attention if he wanted it.' Clint realized he had been staring at the Demon Lord now for what was probably a sufficiently awkward amount of time.

"-Kanye's piece Stronger I found to be quite stimulating." Clint turned his head back to Loki, whoops, totally didn't catch most of that. Clint nodded and hummed in agreement to what he had no idea. He was just glad that no one, including himself caught what Loki may have finished his original thought with.

"Your attentions were preoccupied weren't they? Perhaps regarding a certain Demon Lord?" Clint looked up from his food to see Loki attacking him a dagger sharp look, angled especially severely from his shapeshifted, slanted eyes.

Clint pulled his head back and furrowed his eyebrows in confusion, this level of irritation was different than the anger he displayed earlier in the gym. The look he gave him made his skin crawl.

Clint decided there was no point in lying to the God of Lies.

"Well, yeah, my friend Hank, the butcher, is going to be so excited his venison is being so well enjoyed." Clint pointed his fork at Sesshomaru's full plate and Loki carved his knife-like gaze his way. Sesshomaru, still apparently not paying attention, continued looking down, mauling his cloth napkin with his Freddie Kreuger claws.

"...not hungry Sesshomaru?" Loki's gaze dulled out to his normal stare, and Sesshomaru snapped
his head up, blinking.

'There is something definitely up with Fancy Pants.' Clint thought, forking another chunk of rich crabcake into his mouth, leaning forward.

"...Here Jaken, consume some of this." Sesshomaru pushed off most of his venison and onto Jaken's plate. Loki scrunched his nose.

"Thank you Lord Sesshomaru! I knew you cared about me!" Jaken happily began to carve into the venison like it was a birthday cake. Well at least it won't go to waste.

"Not much better, gotta say Fancy Pants, I'm a little insulted." Clint took another swig of beer, then leaned back tossed a grape up in the air and caught it his mouth. He would try to hit Sesshomaru with one now, but with him being like this now, there'd be no challenge.

"...this Sesshomaru does not need to eat as often as humans do. I mean no offense." Sesshomaru answered placidly, looking at Clint in the eyes, tiredly.

"Well, try it anyway. I swear you'll keep your supermodel figure." Clint smiled and winked at Sesshomaru for good measure, just to get him to react in some way.

He didn't. Instead, Loki shifted his eyes between the two a few times, and Clint almost thought Loki felt annoyed. Clint then mentally smacked himself, Sesshomaru had no idea what a supermodel was.

He also received a quick dart of a dirty look from Tony beside him. Clint just grinned, Tony wasn't the only one who could mess with Fancy Pants.

Tony's attention was captured by Rhodes again and Clint finished his crabcake.

With Loki practically burning Sesshomaru's face off with his stare, Clint decided to keep Loki annoyed, which was far better than himself feeling awkward. With the grape in hand he flicked it expertly at Loki's left temple. It connected with a soft, dewy smack.

"Your attentions were preoccupied weren't they? Perhaps regarding a certain Demon Lord?" Clint repeated verbatim, in the best Loki impression he could. Loki snapped back to him, eyes absolutely iridescent despite them being brown and not green.

Clint didn't anticipate that reaction; he thought he might bite his head off or go off on some sort of monologue about being child and making a mess.

"Why Clint," Loki squared up to the table with a fluid swivel of his broad shoulders. "Do you require my attention? If so what for?" Loki picked up the red grape that Clint hit him which landed on the table, put it to his lips, and sucked it into his mouth.

This guy. He even had to eat grapes with a flourish.

Clint, defensively, took another swig of beer. Loki, unusually, always seemed to know how to render him without a good comeback ready. Like Loki was playing a chess game and was three moves ahead.

"Yeah," Clint stalled. "You mentioned Skrillex, and Stronger, you may like EDM, its electronic dance music. People do a lot of drugs, spin glow-sticks, some irony intended with what Nat calls you, and wear costumes. I can make you a playlist and with more Kanye if you want." Clint recovered, proud of himself. He survived another battle of wits with the God of Mischief.
"Have some key lime pie! It's not half-bad. Take a piece, Clint, and uh Yuki." Pepper surprised him by standing beside him with two plates of pie. He had forgotten there were more than three people at this table. Far more.

"Sure thanks Pepper! Here Yuki." Clint relieved Pepper of both plates and passed one to Loki, who eyed it with zest.

'Yeah, he does like limes doesn't he? I love key lime pie, I mean who doesn't, it's not too sweet, and...damnit green.' Clint looked down, he had already defeated his small ice cream cone and now in front of him, was another green dessert. He leaned back only to lock eyes with Loki.

Brown eyes pierced into his like thread into the eye of a needle.

"Oh yes Clint. I appreciate the attention you give to my curiosities." Loki put a forkful of key lime pie in his mouth, his eyes never straying from their eye contact. Clint swallowed again, reaching for his beer realizing it was out. Defensively, he put a forkful of key lime pie in his mouth. Even Pepper was driving him crazy.

"Uncle Yuki can you tell me a story? One of you and my Lord?! Storm God told me he told everyone the one when you were turned into a purple stag! Did it hurt? What's it like being a deer?" Rin basically had teleported. She now stood next to Loki, twirling from side to side. Apparently sitting between Jaken and Thor, who was mostly talking to Nat, had bored her.

Loki, completely off guard, furrowed his dark eyebrows and scrunched his nose at Sesshomaru who merely raised an eyebrow.

"No it didn't hurt, and it wasn't very much fun having no arms I'll tell you that." Loki smiled warmly and Sesshomaru, took a small bite of the venison, as if to taunt Loki.

"Once long ago two Panther Demons, nephews of a great King, led a raid on the Western Lands. They decimated some mortal villages, leaving nothing but tonguing flames and crying mothers in their wake. Your Lord's father, Inu no Taisho, requested us personally to assassinate them and put an end to their torment." Rin leaned in, wide-eyed in rapt attention and Clint didn't realize he too had his elbows on the table.

"Your Lord and I prepared for battle by sparring tirelessly. I, armed with my spear, and he with his whip, quested through a hidden cavern in order to creep into the middle their domain. Deep within the mountains of Midgard, we stealthily eliminated much of their clan, cutting through their sentries and guards like a farmer's scythe through reeds." Loki spoke with his hands, though didn't conjure any magic. Clint figured he probably wanted to.

"What happened next!?!" Rin scooted closer to Loki and his face lit up.

Then he remembered his question to himself earlier: 'Who listened to Loki besides Sesshomaru?' Rin. Rin hung on every word Loki said. She believed him outright about everything.

"In the dead of night, under a crescent moon, we arrived at their stronghold and your Lord announced his presence with a violent outburst of red youki. The two ruthless and deadly Panther Demons, named Keiji and Kado, drew their weapons, a sword and a pike respectively. The death duels began with a great clash of frosted white Youki against your Lord's own scarlet." Loki had a real knack for telling stories, his facial expressions and his hands drew you in. Clint, at this point noticed practically the whole table was listening.

"Your Lord expertly dueled the elder brother, Keiji, who was as bloodthirsty as he was mighty.
Keiji thought because he had an enchanted sword had the upper hand on Sesshomaru. Keiji, however, underestimated your Lord. A costly error. He was cleaved in two with your Lord's own left hand when he foolishly assumed an attack he unleashed from his enchanted sword had killed him." Loki looked back to Sesshomaru who narrowed his eyes.

"Panther Demons always rely…relied on singular attacks far too often. They lacked ingenuity in battle." Sesshomaru supplied stoically, nibbling slightly on a piece of meat that he picked up with chopsticks.

"Ah yes. His brother Kado didn't quite like that you slew his brother so. When he transformed I took advantage of his blind rage and ensnared then impaled him with my spear. Then we returned to the Western Lands. Your Lord's father simply told us we took too long to complete our quest, if I do recall correctly." Loki finished and turned to Sesshomaru whose ears lowered. Rin beamed in approval.

"I bet Lord's Sesshomaru's father was just joking! You and my Lord Sesshomaru are a great team! You'll certainly defeat those mean blue aliens again!" The table stilled and Clint tensed up. Obviously Rin didn't quite understand why Rhodes was here.

"Tony… did I hear that right, Demons? And did that little girl mean the Chitauri!? They're coming back?" Rhodes certainly didn't pull any punches.

We just had dinner, now it was time for the show.

Thank you for reading! :) this is Clint's first chapter, I hope you liked it! Let me know what you think!

-TL
Sesshomaru and the Premonition

Chapter Notes

sorry for the delay! Adjusting to a new city has left me sort of adrift and a bit depressed. I struggled with this chapter as well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sesshomaru and the Premonition

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Sesshomaru mildly enjoyed observing the antics of the others at the dinner table, though his face was showing none of it. He was comfortable being on the outside of things looking in. It is how he usually interacted with Demons back in his time. Loki, truly, remained the only exception to his typical distant demeanor before he encountered Jaken and later Rin.

He knew not why these humans, especially Stark, found his person so interesting. He very much doubted it had anything to do with the way he carried his person. If anything, the humans here acted far stranger and far more animate.

He logically thought at first the humans would tire of him, and interact solely with Loki, or simply continue with their banal socializing amongst themselves. Yet, they continued to pursue to conversations with him.

Barton who would even toss random projectiles at him like some sort of game. Of course Stark would also strike up conversations with him and play the question game.

No Demon nor human sought him out in his own realm for socializing, something his father knew would affect diplomacy with the Southern Lands and the Lands across the Great Sea. It was one reason he had him meet and study with Loki, to improve his fraternization skills.

Sesshomaru had absolutely no interest in entertaining mindless, sniveling idiots. He'd sooner pull his own talons out of his fingers than suffer the ignorance from the half-witted Demons and humans who kissed his boots for any modicum of relations. He was not one to mince words, or weave tapestries of conversations just to gain favor of someone who only sought their own selfish gain. He was not a tool to be used for political maneuvering.

He would never allow himself to be used.

Sesshomaru was quite thankful he was still considered not of mating age when his father met his untimely end. He absolutely would not have permitted his father to wrangle simpering or manipulative Demonesses to be his mate. He cracked his knuckles at the thought of placating wily Demonesses whose families would have used their union to gain sovereignty over his lands through an heir.

He thought of Bakusaiga. If she were to ever become strong enough to inhabit her humanoid form, she would be a perfect heir to the Western Lands.
He would get back to his realm. He would go back to where he truly belong—Sesshomaru suppressed a smirk when Stark turned his attentions to Loki's story.

Stark's brown eyes narrowed in anticipation to what Loki said next and Sesshomaru caught himself intensely studying him for any sort of positive reaction.

Stark was beginning to encroach on the normally solid buffer zone he constructed around himself. He was becoming an exception. He deftly snatched up the fork that was next to his chopsticks and cracked his knuckles again.

He could have rebuffed Stark harshly by now, but no. He deliberately sought him out. He purposefully bartered with him, with his own person nonetheless, to obtain Rin's translation device. The thought rankled him; it was quite opportune he had something that Stark wanted to barter for her ear device.

He didn't want to ponder if his pride would have allowed him to ask the smug human for a favor. He didn't want to ponder why he found himself listening for his voice that sounded like bellows of a blacksmith.

Sesshomaru twisted the fork in his claws.

He didn't want to ponder why honed his ears onto Stark's heartbeat that quickened almost imperceptibly when Stark caught him studying him. He didn't want to ponder why he had made sure he imprinted in his mind the angle of his lopsided, beard-framed grin and the slant of his untamed eyebrows.

Sesshomaru would have accused Loki or Stark of bewitching him, however he was above such base witchcraft.

His mind tumbled through the events of the day, which by this realm's accounts had not gone poorly.

Sesshomaru had researched the historical documents Jarvis had provided him and there was no historical record of not only his existence, but any Demons. Ever.

'The only information to be had were from myths and legends from fictional texts, such as The Bible, which depicted my race, my people, as either fallen angels (preposterous), from the underworld (impossible), or possessed humans (I knew few who went through trouble). It was if we never existed. Anything I went through and anyone I knew was merely delusion. Any conquest I accomplished, any Demon slain, lost forever. Little Demon lost indeed.' Sesshomaru's sour expression went unnoticed. He had already shredded his napkin, disintegrating the fork shouldn't matter.

He needed not the attention, nor the historical proof he existed from the humans, however, he desired to know what had occurred to his people. Sesshomaru knew not if his coming to the future had any impact on the Demons disappearing, such thoughts of time leaping left a lingering headache behind his eyes.

While his youki was still somewhat depleted from the scry, the poison, and healing, he had received an unexpected boost from Stark's favorable reaction to guessing his favorite musical artist. He had not thought that possible from a human, much less one he had known for such a short time and who routinely pestered and provoked him.

He still remembered his own magenta stripes and indigo moon on Stark's face, the way he looked
in his realm's style of clothing. It was days ago, yes, but sitting across from Stark for an extended period of time caused him to recollect that event.

It was shockingly… comforting to see something that reminded him of his own home, even if it was just a traditional yukata and his own hakama with a sash. And for it to be Stark to ember such a warm sentiment in him perplexed him further.

'Stark is a peculiar human indeed. His positive opinions of this Sesshomaru spike my youki levels considerably. And I am not in immediate disapproval of it.' Sesshomaru had indeed noticed the quick arrows of gazes that Stark sent his way, especially when he was in the cooking nook.

Sesshomaru had little idea what he meant when he defended his lack of human cooking skills. Was Stark implying that this Sesshomaru didn't care about his cooking skills? If so, could Stark have a certain interest in him beyond his youki and toxin? Their conversation had definitely implied a certain physicality he had not missed.

Sesshomaru took a sip of his wine and looked down at his raw meat. Of course he didn't care if Stark could cook, he didn't eat anything cooked. He had even thought it amusing he had conned Barton into making his human root-vegetable dish for him.

'Stark vexes me. He clearly finds this Sesshomaru of some curiosity. But, does Stark find me a mere curiosity to only further his own interests in defending his realm, or something more? Surely some of his interactions show an interest beyond my Demonic abilities.' Sesshomaru flexed the fingers of his left hand, as if to ensure the hand could still function.

He summoned his toxin and it began to corrode and melt the one of the prongs of the fork hidden in his lap.

'He also did hold this Sesshomaru's wrist. Stark, aside from greeting this "Rhodey" does not make a habit of physically engaging other humans. However, he harbors a stronger interest in this Rhodey than I. He is quite animated with him, and has not spoken to this Sesshomaru this dinner.' Sesshomaru waived off any notion that Stark could prefer his company over Rhodey's. The evidence was quite clear the opposite was true.

Did he care whether or not Stark found him more or less fascinating than the human who seemed to know so much about him? If he did care, why?

Sesshomaru melted the other prongs off the fork and instinctively made a small, slender stiletto out of the metal. He stole a glance over to Rin who was still clearly engaged in the story of the assassination of the Panther Brothers.

It was quite the successful quest, if his father's only criticism was that they weren't as expedient as he wished. He had slain a Demon most ignorant masses considered outclassed him in power and skill. He had also slain him without the aid of the sword his father denied him: Tessaiga.

It turned out that senile old Demon Totosai and his old friend Bokuseno were correct in the end, he most certainly didn't need anyone's own power beyond his own. Totosai was right to fear, and revere him the way he did, no one in this realm seemed to, well perhaps except for the animals.

The dogs of this realm acted precariously around him. The ones he encountered didn't necessarily approach him, but would stop in their tracks and tilt their heads. They always stilled, watching him, sometimes stopping mid-bark to observe.

Never would one bark at him, as if the dogs knew to only speak when spoken to. He didn't wish to
speak to the submissive dogs which the humans had apparently started to enslave with straps called leashes. He had to be educated by Jarvis that in this time the humans and dogs shared a symbiotic relationship, one of provider and loyal companion.

Sesshomaru arrived at the conclusion that humans that could not find proper companionship with other humans must project their desire for love and attention onto the unsuspecting canines.

Disreputable humans...at least the humans he cohabited with did not seem to share this desperate desire for companionship with animals. Sesshomaru didn't think Stark's habits of imbibing in human spirits, flying about in a suit of armor, and odd hours spent in his 'lab' befit one to care for an outdoor animal.

What did befit him was the ingenuity and efficiency when creating devices, such as the one he constructed for Rin. He perceived he was swift when inventing due to an impending invasion, yet he finished Rin's device, which held no priority, quicker than he anticipated.

It pleased him to see Rin so happy, and that others cared for her welfare as well.

The dinner was going well, his ruse to sit Loki and Barton together succeeded. Sesshomaru's instincts indicated to him that edging the archer towards Loki could produce a courtship. Loki liked companionship, he enjoyed attention and flattery. Barton, the quirky archer worked quite suitably for that role. It is one reason he had accepted the venison from Barton, the other was understanding what the gesture truly meant. Barton was no fool, and neither was Sesshomaru.

He simply had no appetite and gave most of it to Jaken as to not squander a good cut of meat. He twirled the makeshift stiletto in his hand, his toxin had worn it down to be a proper dart.

He had felt uneasy when he became the unintended target of a jealous Loki. He had no interest in Barton, that Loki should know, yet Barton sought his attention anyway. He could not control Barton's actions; Loki would have to convince the bizarre archer to focus on him. Just like how Rhodey commanded Stark's focus. He frowned.

Rhodey was a military officer of some acclaim and looked capable enough. He also piloted aircraft, such as Barton and Romanoff. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to ask Rhodey about the technical documents in his possession, but had no desire to do so.

The events this morning still jarred him, he hoped Loki had not noticed he has scryed again. He would not hear the end of his nagging. Loki's story was beginning to end, and Sesshomaru could not be more relieved, there was far too much commotion.

"Tony… did I hear that right, Demons? And did that little girl mean the Chitauri!? They're coming back?" Perfect. Stark's friend Rhodey had caught on. Sesshomaru palmed his small stiletto and took a sip of his wine with his other hand.

"Um. Well, Rhodey, what would you say if we had reason to believe that I didn't nuke all those sons of bitches?" Sesshomaru stiffened and set his jaw as he saw Rin tilt her head in confusion. Son of what?! His youki flared slightly, a blue pulse on the floor around him. Sesshomaru could tell Stark felt it.

"Stark you may want to discontinue using that particular turn of phrase." Loki suggested glibly and Rin climbed into his lap, whispering into Loki's ear a question about the phrase. Stark's eyebrows went to his hairline.

"Was that meant as an insult you blubbery human?! You dare imply that dogs are lower than——"
Sesshomaru sighed through his nose, knowing Jaken would catch his exasperation.

Sesshomaru wished at that moment he would be anywhere but there. He debated leaving…was his presence truly required? He fingered the stiletto he made, debating carving something into his wooden chair just like what happened to his arm during his scry.

His jaw clenched tight, his fangs lengthened.

"Uh. Yeah. Good Call." Stark coughed. Sesshomaru stopped caring about whatever they were talking about.

He also wished to study the technical documents Jarvis gave him and search again for his Mother's tomb. He was unwilling to ask Jarvis about such a closely guarded objective of finding the White Salt Land, lest Stark catch wind of it. He still pondered whom to ask about such a delicate place. He knew Stark would ask him a myriad of questions about why he wanted to go there. Perhaps Polly would know.

"So Tony, what's this dinner really all about? Cut the crap." Sesshomaru's ears pricked up, and he looked across and to his right. Rhodey looked straight at him, dark eyes searching for any clue as to his identity. He didn't want to have to go into more introductions. He wanted to slip away, he still felt tired and his chest felt tight. There were simply too many humans around him, he felt crowded.

He simply wished to listen to the new bands he received in relative peace. Polly gave him the Arctic Monkeys, Beyonce, The Airborne Toxic Event, and Incubus. He also wanted see the progress on the toxin Stark and Banner made. He had heard promising updates, that they separated neurotoxin aspect, and the corrosive aspect and increasing their potency separately.

Sesshomaru recalled when he provided Jaken the means to listen to that particular musical artist he literally danced. He had not seen that specific reaction out of his retainer since he trained Jaken to fully control his true form.

"Now, before you freak out, because you will, let me tell you that this is a matter of not just National but um, like Global Security, as Fury would put it. The guy across from me is Lord Sesshomaru, aka Sailor Moon, Pretty Boy, or Fancy Pants. Whichever you prefer. He's a Dog Demon. Jaken is some sort of Demon Toad servant, the kid is Rin, she's adopted." Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes at Stark then regarded Rhodey who did a spit take on his beer.

How uncouth.

"What? Tony what are you talking about? He doesn't even have horns. Where did he come from if not Asgard?! Please don't say hell." Rhodey recovered, wiping his face with his sleeve. Sesshomaru's ears lowered and he wrinkled his nose. What exactly was with humans and their obsession with horns and hell? He'd rather had the military officer flee or cower than assume he had them. What happened to his innate ability to strike fear into humans?

"Uh, more like when did he come from. He's complicated. He's one half of 'Sesshoki', the guy next to him." Stark announced and gestured to both Loki and Sesshomaru.

Loki, then magicked off his Japanese disguise, donned on his armor and waved with Rin in his lap.

Sesshomaru watched the blood drain from Rhodey's face as he realized who Loki really was. Even with his sense of smell muted, he could smell the fear and revulsion waft off him. Rhodey jumped from the table, spilling his beer and grabbing his firearm, pointing it at Loki in record time.
"Loki. Loki is here! On your balcony in New York!" Sesshomaru lowered his ears and cracked his knuckles. This clumsy, emotional human dare point that firearm at Loki with Rin in his lap, and his hand shaking the way it did? His finger shook on the trigger, the safety mechanism on the firearm had been switched unsafe.

"Ah yes, and what lovely weather we are having. Tell me is New York supposed to be this balmy in April?" Loki taunted musically. Sesshomaru fought the urge to roll his eyes. Rin merely giggled and Tony stood up, hands up as if he was the one the gun was pointed at.

"Wea…weather?! You. You want to talk about the weather?! Honestly, I'm surprised there isn't more thunder…" Rhodey jutted his head towards Thor who reared back, his gold hair glinting. "Or I don't know why my best friend here isn't making it hail bullets on your Asgardian ass." Rhodey's hand was still shaking, Sesshomaru kept his hearing on his muscles, in particular his heart rate. He took a sip of his wine.

"Rhodey, Just, hear us out. Things have gotten, well complicated. And you've known me forever, you know I've never had a knack for keeping things simple…" Stark started and his friend's hand twitched, as if angling to point the gun at Stark. If humans, even with ones with lifelong loyalty to an ally of Loki regarded him with such vitriol, there may not be much hope for the others.

Rhodes decided to ignore Stark and turned his attention back towards Loki.

"You sick, murderous, snake. If that girl wasn't in your…oh no, you've mind controlled everyone here! God, I have to…" It was then Thor to Sesshomaru's distant right and Clint stood up automatically.

"My brother has not bewitched us, he hasn't the—" Thor started.

"Thor, unless your next words are 'Mjolnir taze Loki' I don't want to hear it." Rhodey bit back, hand still shaking with rage.

"Rhodes, Rin's in his lap, you got way too much adrenaline in your system to risk a shot like that. And for the last time, my eyes aren't blue." Barton had begun to sweat, Sesshomaru could smell it.

"Barton, I've always liked you, but you know why I can't exactly trust you with something like this. And don't doubt my marksmanship." Sesshomaru's superior senses, honed solely on Rhodes, caught the twitch in his forearm muscle holding the firearm. In the instant before it would transfer to his hand he flicked his striped wrist and threw the stiletto with expert precision.

With a shrill, clanging shriek, the dart shot into the barrel of now useless firearm.

Rhodes yanked his arm back in reflex, Sesshomaru immediately felt the entire attention of the table shift his way. What an awful affair this was.

"You have ears and if you are Stark's comrade, most likely a brain between them. Use them human." Sesshomaru suggested mildly, he didn't particularly like Rhodes, he finally concluded. Loki's forehead wrinkled. Sesshomaru's right mind knew that Loki would not allow harm to befall Rin, however now he had a good excuse to rid himself of his growing frustrations.

Pause.

"Did you fashion that dart out of your fork?" Loki finally questioned. Sesshomaru nodded once.

"You know I liked this gun, Tony, but I have another." Rhodes protested and Stark finally closed his mouth.
"Yeah, he has a thing against silverware, it's probably a werewolf thing. Look, in all seriousness, Loki can't mind control me, remember? The Chitauri are coming back, Demons are real, and Loki, well, is on our side." Stark, ran a hand through his beard. Werewolf? By the Four Lands what is a werewolf?!

"Tony. This can't be right. Do you know what my superiors are going to say?! I have to call this in. I can't save you from this." Rhodeway stammered and finally Lady Potts stood up, rushing to stand next to him.

"Rhodes, you need to take a deep breath. There is a lot you need to be filled in on, which is why we brought you here. Loki really isn't the enemy here. It's someone else." Lady Potts managed to deescalate Rhodes and he lowered his useless firearm and glared at Stark who now straightened his posture.

"I should have known there was a catch when you guys said you had fresh crabs from Charleston and that I just had to swing by. Nothing can ever be easy with you Tony. If I am not one hundred and fifty percent satisfied with this situation, we will send a tact team here Tony, and you'll be charged with harboring an enemy of the state. That's high treason, for all of you, well, maybe not the Werewolf Demon Lord." Rhodeway pointed to the whole table, finger last on Sesshomaru who flared his youki on the floor again in warning.

'He is brazen enough to threaten the sovereignty and security of Stark's fortress, while inside it and he calls us treasonous? What means of hierarchy did this realm employ? I must refresh the proximity barrier with haste if this Rhodes means to send his forces here. If I am a guest in Stark's fortress I am honor-bound to defend it.' Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles, for the life of him he didn't understand why Stark did not resend his friend's invitation. He must truly value him.

"Yeah, yeah, I know put up or shut up. It's time for show and tell, here I'll have Jarvis show you everything in the order we saw it. Trust us, it'd win best picture." Stark's voice became faint as he and Lady Potts guided a reluctant Rhodeway into a room.

"We're so going to have to play a darts game at some point Fancy Pants." Barton pointed. Sesshomaru wrinkled his nose. Play? This Sesshomaru did not play any human games. Well, aside from with Stark that is.

"We need to strategize on how to inform SHIELD about all of this." Romanoff wasted no time indeed.

"This will go well. Real well. Fury's vein was busting out of his forehead when he met the fake-Fancy Pants. Getting him to hear us out will be impossible now." Everyone thinks I'm brainwashed again!" Barton sat back down and put his elbows on the table miserably. Sesshomaru felt Loki's magic surge in what he interpreted as guilt and anger.

"Fury would have to at least take it into consideration! It's the planet we are talking about. He can't just ignore a threat like this. Especially after seeing what the Chitauri are really capable of." Rogers chimed in, countering with a valid enough point.

"You forget, he doesn't trust anything that those two have to say, and he already is dubious of Thor. He would have to see Loki, separate of Sesshomaru, to even entertain the idea they are separate people, and well, you know how that would end up." The Berserker pointed out. And Sesshomaru didn't quite follow.

"Somehow, we need to make him listen to us, make him get his head out of his ass and see the light… what Nat?" Barton suggested, straightening up from the table, face flushed in frustration.
and from Romanoff eyeing him.

"Let us extend an invite Man of Fury over for a banquet as well! This one has gone well thus far." Thor beamed from down the table, Sesshomaru saw Loki shift to face Thor better as if in agreement.

"Oh yes, aside from Colonel Rhodes almost shooting me with a mortal child in my lap." Loki drawled and Rin giggled and wiggled out of his lap.

"Get off it, like you'd let anything happen to the munchkin." Barton half-laughed and Sesshomaru was inclined to agree.

"...that's a solid tactic Thor. If we lure Fury here, we can insure he sees what we intend him to see from Jarvis' security logs." Romanoff agreed, her expression serious.

"I'd also particularly like to avoid going into SHIELD headquarters. I will need to come clean, even about the shape shifting, to facilitate even a modicum of trust." Loki confessed and Banner nodded. Barton leaned back, face studying Loki's.

"That could work, Tony's security measures can easily hold back Fury and whoever he brings with him, probably Hill and Coulson. If Fury agrees to look at the videos we have, they'll have to be on board." Rogers agreed, throwing a thumb back to the tower.

"What about Fancy Pants here? Wasn't the whole point of Loki shape shifting into him was that he was going to make Fury into abstract art?" Berserker gestured to him, while Sesshomaru understood his point, it simply didn't matter anymore. That particular morning felt like months ago. He could endure this human, or put him in his place. Sesshomaru took a deep breath.

Heads swiveled his direction.

"...Do as you wish." Sesshomaru finally said. Loki eyed him suspiciously, as did Barton.

"Guys, Fury doesn't even need to talk to Sesshomaru. We can just show him what Jarvis picked up, including our own reactions." Rogers reasoned, eating a forkful of the root vegetable dish Barton constructed.

'I would rather this whole ordeal take place without me present. I have objectives to take care of but as of late I am still insufficiently prepared. Not to mention the additional healing…' Sesshomaru's thoughts drifted, not particularly caring what they decided to do with this Fury, or this organization they worked for.

He will assist Loki and help protect him and his own pack. He will take down the Mad Titan to achieve the greatness he was destined for. The prestige and acclaim that only came with conquering the next more powerful threat, just like the Panther brothers. He will dispose of him, with the help of these humans or not.

"Son of Taisho, what do you think of this plan?! You have been unusually silent even for one of your disposition." Sesshomaru's caught wide involuntarily at the sight of Thor looking straight into his eyes and flashbacked to his scry.

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*His body lay bloodied, broken, and scorched while Storm God flickered over him. The thunderbolts arced in on him, condensing like a funnel into Mjolnir. Storm God flexed, his mouth twisted into a*
haughty, flashy smile once reserved only for Magatsuhi. He raised his meaty right hand high. With no sound but the static of electricity ringing in Sesshomaru's ears, the right hand came down.

Loki screamed "No".

"Thor's right again, you didn't even troll Tony at dinner." Romanoff studied him, swirling her human spirits. Sesshomaru shocked back into conversation. He couldn't let the humans know his mind clouded upon itself with foreboding thoughts.

"...if I were your commander I would want proof of the armada. By what scouting means does your realm possess?" Sesshomaru barely recognized his own voice and he knew he was drawing undue attention to himself. He would hate to address his own failure in his own scouting attempt.

The table fell silent.

"We have some space probes but those aren't instantaneous. Satellites are mostly too close to Earth...Rhodes may actually know better than we would." Berserker confessed, leaning forward, deep in thought. Sesshomaru had sussed out that the Berserker, when stable, was on par with Stark's intelligence.

"SHIELD has been trying and failing to produce anything viable for the past few years. It's been locked up in red tape. No country wants another to have more intel on an extra-terrestrial threat than another, so they can’t agree on a neutral launch point of the probes. Regardless, the probes weren't even past the testing stages." Romanoff took a deep gulp of her human spirits, clearly this had been bothering her.

"Heimdall! You and Loki can ask Heimdall right?" Rogers directed at Thor.

"With the Bifrost damaged and Allfather's magic drained I can neither communicate nor return." Thor scratched his head and Sesshomaru heard Loki huff. The Storm God had indeed gotten more dense since in the past few centuries. At least he seemed to be. If his scry was any indicator he could be lulling him into believing he was less intelligent than he truly was.

"You dolt, how do you think I got here?! There are ways to travel besides the Bifrost, and I have been doing so for centuries. How do you think I snuck off to Midgard, or snuck Sesshomaru into Asgard?" Loki gestured to himself dramatically, taking off his armor in the process. Sesshomaru stiffened at the idea of Loki returning to the distant realm. He didn't need to voice his displeasure over such a place. While splendid, it was a carefully crafted illusion of a city, a façade.

The Aesir…Sesshomaru would never trust them. He didn't fully trust Thor. Now, after the scry, he didn't know if he could even trust Loki.

"Yeah, but isn't that, like a terribly bad idea for you to go back to Asgard?" Barton questioned, voice deep. Loki regarded him curiously.

'If only I was successful in scrying the Other, Loki and Thor would not have to go to such extremes.' Sesshomaru shifted uncomfortably, unaccustomed to failure.

"I will vouch for you brother! Besides once Heimdall reveals the fleet father will have to believe you!" Thor boomed and Loki chuckled darkly. Barton tensed his shoulders.

"You are far too naive Thor. Not even you can save me from Odin's wrath. But, it appears Sho and
the ever patriotic Captain have a point. Heimdall would be the only one who can reveal the fleet. I can't wait to see the look on Odin's when I show up in his Throne room. It will be such a treat.” Loki smirked cynically and took a deep sip from his red wine. Red liquid. The blood pool. Sesshomaru was thrown back into his previous scry.

The same darkness lorded over his senses, humid and perverse. It this time felt of smoke, smelled of thunder, and tasted like despair.

The same warm, viscous, red pool lapped at his bare feet, teasing him into it. He obliged and he waded out into its morbid expanse. Bakusaiga and Tenseiga were missing entirely from the splendor.

The metallic Demon blood this time whorled around him clockwise, creating a whirlpool. The hands of blood stirred it, the blood began to glow and Sesshomaru swore it chuckled somehow. He waded till the Demon blood hit chest-level and he kicked up once more.

"The Other." Sesshomaru's voice demanded, and echoed into the expanding, starless void. Each time his words reverberated it sounded less and less like his own and instead morphed into a murky, mocking caw.

Sesshomaru's body writhed and his head jerked back, jaw wide in a silent, shocked cry. The hands wrenched his left arm out, almost out of its socket. Sesshomaru let out a malicious hiss, but the hands with their red fingers burrowed deep into his wrist and shoulder like wires.

He attempted to slice and claw at the blood with his right hand, but it was a futile endeavor. His right hand remained unresponsive, as if half of his body was rendered inert in a hazy nightmare. Sesshomaru, helpless, bared his fangs as the tender skin of his left underarm was twisted upwards. The fingers grazed the soft skin knowingly.

Without warning, they lacerated a name into the soft skin of his underarm. The wires scrawled unevenly, jaggedly, and without hesitation.

The name glowed like a furnace. The Other. Before Sesshomaru could even register pain or recognition of what happened control of his arm was returned to him.

He, again, liquefied with the whirling blood. Only this time, the hands that gripped his hair wrenched his essence down headfirst. The hands punished the Demon for his insolence, how dare he demand anything of them?

He began to dissolve. The current surged strong and slow. The hands would show him what his arrogance would bring. The pool began to drip upwards once more.

Another human metropolis. This one massive with a river and a tower made of two pink spheres, the lower larger than the upper. Tall skyscrapers jutted out, some falling, most flaming. The writing was similar to what he knew in his time and the humans looked the same as well.

The city was under siege. Above it stalled a massive battleship, circular and pulsing its violet energy field across the grey sky. The city glowed faint purple which along with the fires and choking smoke painted the glass and concrete like a dingy sunset even though it was afternoon.

The humans screamed, their cars' sirens blared in feeble protest to the devastation currently bombarding it. Soldiers stood guard around the periphery, waiting.
Loki and Thor stood facing the rest of them, wicked grins on their faces and their eyes bright and cold. Behind them stood a blue figure holding a gold scepter.

Lightning danced all around Thor in an intensity Sesshomaru had never witnessed before. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. Loki's magic branched across the sky, matching the otherworldly hue of the ultraviolet spaceship.

At Loki's hip, Tenseiga shook and cried. How did Loki come by Tenseiga!?

A corrosive, stinging pain lanced up his left arm. He couldn't move anything below his elbow. His hakama was tattered and armor shattered, his bloody arm underneath it hung mangled and raw, exposed bone jutted out the back of his gnarled hand.

He held the hilt of Bakusaiga in his right hand, her blade severed and broken. His left arm twitched every so often from faulty nerve endings. He registered unrelenting pain, forking across his body, coming mostly from his left arm and leg.

He couldn't seem to muster and youki to heal himself. What had happened here?! How could Bakusaiga have been broken?! How was his arm so damaged? How could he be so depleted of youki?

Familiar voices registered in his head. He stood. Wait since when had he been kneeling?! He scanned the ravaged street, it opened into a street that paralleled a river.

The Avengers were gathered in front of him in various tactical positions, all facing Thor and Loki who now had descended to ground level.

Were they fighting Loki and Thor? No. This surely had to be false.

Romanoff opened fire on Loki, yet the bullet deflected off a purple force field. Sesshomaru growled and ignored the pain in his left ankle to leap closer to the battle he had been obviously engaged in.

He subconsciously took a position next to Stark, whose suit was clearly damaged. He found himself still holding Bakusaiga. He remembered his daughter's childish, precocious face. If she shattered would that mean she had perished?

He flexed his good hand, summoning his toxin to coat what remained of Bakusaiga's blade. No she had to be alive. He simply had to make that fool Tototsai to reforge her.

"This planet, this world is ours, you careless mortals!" Sesshomaru turned his attention to Loki, who now looked right at him. It was then he noticed the small, green body in the rubble behind Loki.

Jaken.

He lived no more. His body being so close to the river, he had surely had taken on his true form at one point during the battle. His burnt body smelled of pine, Loki's magic. He died honorably, but the rage ate his lungs like a poison nonetheless. It was true. They were their enemies now.

He would not allow Loki to continue this rampage. This betrayal!

"You two have to snap out of it before it's too late!" Sesshomaru heard Barton's shrill shout and he fired a special arrow at Storm God whose lightning shot it out of the sky as if it were a feather. Storm God started to spin Mjolnir. Sesshomaru knew what was next.
A trident of lightning forked out and at the last moment he dropped Bakusaiga and summoned his whip of light, lassoing Barton's ankle, slinging him to the ground to avoid a lethal lightning blast.

The second bolt hit the Berserker, who grunted in response.

The third was aimed at Romanoff, but first to fall was Rogers.

Rogers successfully shielded the strike meant for the huntress. Yet, they had two opponents. Sesshomaru's whip was woefully out of range as Loki teleported next to Rogers.

It was no contest.

Loki's uru daggers impaled the blond human from behind. Sesshomaru cracked his knuckled as Loki twisted the daggers. With glee, his best friend gutted the human leader exposing his spinal cord and bent open ribs. The blood and intestines that spurted forth from bedclothes irked him.

Sesshomaru attempted to summon his youki, but his body was sluggish, how much blood had he lost?!

Romanoff, visibly horrified, a rarity, fired her guns, but it was all for naught. A bolt of lightning crooked down from the sky striking her and drove her limp body into a vehicle. She lay unnaturally slumped and motionless, blood pooled freely from her steaming body.

Sesshomaru eked out the last bit of strength and agility to tackle Stark in his damaged suit out of the way of a wounded Berserker as he charged Storm God. The face plate on his suit was damaged, he had a cut above his eye and his pupils were dilated in fear.

Stark feared a loss. Never. He would not allow these treacherous Aesir to defeat him. He was Sesshomaru, Lord of the West and would lose to no one. Not even the Princes of the distant realm. Sesshomaru, too stunned to deal with the impact of Loki's betrayal rebounded up, pulling Stark up with his one good arm, demanding his body straighten to his typically regal posture.

Storm God knocked the Berserker back and with a deafening boom. Sesshomaru zipped forward to intercept Loki but was thrown back by his magic and he found himself propelled back into a vehicle across the street. He heard Stark call his name, fear evident. Sesshomaru opened his eyes as a powerful projectile from the battleship hit the Berserker, leaving him in a crater, untransformed.

Sesshomaru heard the Berserker's heart. He still lived. He pried himself from the wreckage, determined. He would need the Berserker's help to distract the Storm God while he dealt with his former frie-

In that instant the blue figure hit the Berserker with a blast from the scepter. His body crumpled inwards, blackened and smoldering, pelvis bone visible. He didn't move again, the stench of burnt flesh stung his nostrils.

His heartbeat stopped in silence. Sesshomaru frowned deeply.

He could not rely on Stark and Barton alone to deal with Storm God. He needed Tenseiga, he had to retrieve him to revive the humans. However, Barton acted first.

He saw Barton unleash an arrow which hit Loki dead on in the center of his chest. Loki ripped it out and drew back his arm to throw his dagger. Sesshomaru leapt towards Loki.

However, Loki hesitated throwing the dagger and Stark hit him with youki enhanced energy blasts
from his suit, sparks flew from his right hand. Loki was sent soaring back. Yes. Vulnerable. He could retrieve Tenseiga, he braced himself and sprinted forward only to see a familiar black head of hair slumped against a fallen rubbish bin next to Storm God.

Rin.

Storm God picked her up. She lived. Her heartbeat could be heard.

He growled deeply and blood flooded his sight and his markings ran jagged and long. How dare he hold her?! He changed direction; Rin's safety remained paramount.

Storm God, eyes cold as ice, then threw Mjolnir. Sesshomaru effortlessly dodged the hammer.

But the attack was not meant for him, he had merely been in the line of sight of Barton. The uru hammer punched Barton directly in the gut. His body caved in on itself in midair, spine powdered, bow forgotten.

He, like Romanoff, had little chance as his splintered body slapped the ground like a wet animal skin.

Sesshomaru fought his transformation with all he was worth as he charged Storm God with his claws filled with toxin.

How dare they? How could they do this? Loki brought him here! Loki told him to save this realm, to harken to these humans and he just killed their leader! He allowed his brother to kill the Berserker, Romanoff, and his intended mate!

"Sesshomaru fall back, you're too badly hurt!" He heard Stark, but no. He would not and was not. He dodged the predictable return of Storm God's hammer and redoubled his efforts. He was a Demon Lord; he was greater than these Aesir. He was the pinnacle of majesty, the elite. He would reclaim his oldest daughter from the clutches of this Storm God and split open his chest, pull out his heart and force feed it to Loki for their betrayal and dishonor.

He would then revive the humans with Tenseiga, force Loki to return him to his realm, reforge his youngest daughter, and return to slaughter the Mad Titan, then Loki in front of his own King, then the King of the distant realm.

He connected with Storm God's shoulder, flesh tearing under his toxic talons and with his last dredges of youki he fought him. He would not allow him to kill Stark, nor Rin. He was after all, used to fighting with one hand.

Storm God grimaced and Sesshomaru dodged his thunderbolts that rained down like spears. He struck again, but only met his armor. He had to make him drop his hold on Rin. He summoned his toxin whip.

It was then he realized he had left Stark to fight Loki one on one. An unbelievably ghastly oversight on his part. He took the sky for a vantage point and scanned the area.

Sesshomaru's blood ran cold.

Sesshomaru, Lord of the Western Lands, the most powerful demon of the Feudal Era, was too little too late.

He barely twisted out of the way in time of Storm God's punch to see Loki's twin daggers tear through Stark's suit and almost rip him completely in two. Sparks, blood, and entrails showered
down as the blue light in the chest of the suit went dim. He could not see Stark's face but he heard his strangled scream.

Sesshomaru heard Stark's heart stop, and his own thudded unevenly in his swollen throat.

He failed him.

He failed the one being who made his blood boil in more ways than one. Sesshomaru's blood ran cold and his jaw dropped. What use was his power if he couldn't save the only one who….

Sesshomaru roared. In a blast of scarlet youki he transformed into his grand true form, all white fur, toxic saliva and keen fangs. In a flash he reared back and charged Storm God biting down and tearing open his side. A guttural yell belted from Storm God as a reward, he dropped Rin harmlessly to the ground. Rin stirred, raising her head to look at him. Panic made her eyes water, already red from previous tears. He managed a small, reassuring smile, knowing even in his true form Rin would see it.

It was his chance.

He had to focus, just like he had done in his first fight for Tessaiga against Inuyasha. He pooled his mental reserves into an ability he rarely utilized: telekinesis. He used it once to pommel that idiot priestess Kagome with skulls once.

He levitated Rin, and quickly and with his renowned control, softly tossed her to a crowd of military personnel and healers. One human took her away, and while Loki saw where Rin went, he did not pursue her.

Instead, Loki sharply turned and unleashed his purpled black magic. Great magic chains ensnared his four paws, including the damaged one. A thick, searing noose gripped his neck, strangling his larynx, just like the leashes he had seen. In his bloodlust he heard a familiar hum. Tenseiga.

Hope. There was hope. Tenseiga. He transformed back to his humanoid form right as Mjolnir struck him from behind, his spine fracturing from the surprise blunt force. Pain fanned out as torment across his body and he fell forward, his hair silver, clumped and crimson falling around him.

His knees bit into the graveled asphalt. He now knelt before Loki. Tenseiga hummed and thrashed, so close yet so far away from his battered right hand. Loki's black magic once again held his right wrist and his neck in place. Loki didn't even bother with the left wrist. The bindings blistered and burned his striped wrist and his neck. His markings had turned crimson long ago it seemed.

The magic snares savagely zapped all his remaining youki, as he glared up, red-eyed at Storm God who hovered above him, fangs bared. His voice, stretched and worn, yelled.

"Loki! Storm God! I'll show you both no mercy!" Sesshomaru struggled to gather himself, any remaining strength to fuel his fury. It was foolish to not restrict his shredded left arm. With everything he had, he summoned his whip from his gnawed down fingers and swung his left arm from the shoulder, using his whole arm like a whip he hit Loki in the chest. The magic faltered. He lunged for Tenseiga as he flung his arm back to hit Storm God in the adams apple with the green toxic band.

Right before his fingers grazed Tenseiga he was cannoned off course by a burst of blue magic. He forgot about the blue figure. He struck the pavement and skidded facing up, his chest oozing blood slowly.
He had seen smoking skies before, but never before had he felt so small beneath them.

The blue figure spoke came into view, a woman. Her black eyes glistened in victory.

"Nice work. Terra will be yours, once you and the Aesir fulfill one last mission for me."

Sesshomaru struggled as then he watched Storm God turn to Loki. What was this devilry? This was all a farce to rule this realm?! Loki vowed. He took an oath. He had been deceived by the God of Lies. Loki stood stock still, magic restraints weren't needed, Sesshomaru had nothing left.

His heart thudded in his throat, he would not die lying on the ground. He abhorred lying about. He sluggishly made his way to a twisted seated position on the broken road.

"My destiny is now complete! Any last words, Dog Demon?" Loki spoke, voice cold like the breeze from the Northern Lands during winter.

He had no more words for either of them. They were not worth it.

Loki magicked his spear and raised it high, and Sesshomaru glared at him dead in the eye the entire time as the spear knifed towards him.

No underworld could contain him. He would avenge all of them.

The glinting spear stopped short. Loki's hesitation trembled the spear in his bloody hand and his widened his eyes in shock. Loki opened his mouth to speak.

Tenseiga was vehemently pulsing his light blue aura, but he was soon blinded by a barbed arc of white light.

He felt the lightning strike, yet didn't at the same time. The next thing he knew he was on his back smelling the stench of his own blackened flesh and singed hair. Paralyzed, he could only look up at the God of Storms with a mouth full of metallic blood.

Jaken had been right, this realm had doomed them all.

His body lay bloodied, broken, and scorched while Storm God flickered over him. The thunderbolts arced in on him, condensing like a funnel into Mjolnir. Storm God flexed, his mouth twisted into a haughty, flashy smile once reserved only for Magatsuhi. He raised his meaty right hand high. With no sound but the static of electricity ringing in Sesshomaru's ears, the right hand came down.

Loki screamed "No".

He thought of Rin's smile, Stark's touch, Jaken's outbursts, Ah Un's snorting. He never did fulfill his promise to Rin to reunite her and Ah Un, did he?

And with a fistsing, crack of lightning Mjolnir cracked down upon his skull, splitting it wide open, pulping it.

"Sesshomaru, what in the Nines is wrong?!!" Loki was holding his shoulders. While he did scry something, Bakusaiga had been right, he had not been successful in his intended purpose. Unless that blue figure had been the Other. He did not think so. All the doubt and distrust he quelled earlier in the day rushed back to the forefront of his mind.

Loki wouldn't betray him, it couldn't happen. Yet, if he truly thought that, then why had he avoided
Loki today? Sesshomaru's gut churned in doubt. He sliced a glance over the whole table, landing on Thor. Thor outsmarting him and double crossing him? It seemed laughably unlikely. Thor, while of average intelligence, was mostly honorable and nauseatingly loyal.

Yet, he did allow his precious little brother to be tortured for three human years in the distant realm under the rule of his prideful King...Could what he scryed be a warning, that the distant realm was plotting something?

Those questions had been tearing him apart for a good portion of the day. What he witnessed, the future, seemed far too real to written off as mere fantasy. He pursed his lips into a thin line.

"It is of no concern." Sesshomaru heard himself respond, his voice sounding thin and quiet. Stark had not returned, he continued to stare straight ahead, not meeting Loki's nor Barton's gaze. Sesshomaru almost wished Stark he was here to distract with his babblings; however, he'd be just as curious.

"...you did, didn't you? You did! You scryed this morn!" Loki leaned back, hands leaving his shoulders. Loki surveyed him, dismayed and irate. Loki's magic sparked black next to him and Barton lean forward, trying to get Loki's attention.

"What?! You did another tornado thing?" Rogers dropped the straw he was twirling.

"No. I have sense practiced with Bakusaiga, she will not act that way again." Sesshomaru finally caught the gaze of Loki who steamed with magic. This was exactly what Sesshomaru wanted to avoid. He didn't want everyone's attention on him, including Rin and Jaken with assorted emotions, most being confusion.

"Son of Taisho what did you far-see?!" Thor indeed sounded serious this time, he didn't quite blame him but knew he couldn't tell him anything. What was he to say? Oh, that he had a premonition and saw him kill most of these humans, and himself?

The thought of being killed by an Aesir still left a bad taste in his mouth, how inglorious.

"You've been tense all day. Keeping it all in doesn't work, I'm speaking from experience. You can tell us, maybe we can help." The Berserker supplemented. Since when did these humans think they could read him so?

'The insatiable curiosity of these humans frustrate me.' Sesshomaru straightened his posture.

'It should not matter if I told them who I attempted to scry.' Sesshomaru turned to Loki who looked as if he wanted to pry the words forcibly from his mouth. He sighed through his nose, the humans and Loki were gratingly persistent and he'd rather tell them now, while Stark was gone.

"...The Other. It failed. Instead this Sesshomaru had a premonition of the future." Sesshomaru's lips thinned and he felt an explosion of magic to his left.

Loki was on his feet, obsidian magic spiking erratically. If he kept it up his fading proximity barrier would not be able to block his magic signature. Sesshomaru couldn't allow that to happen; he stood facing him.

"You absolutely reckless dog! You cannot attempt to scry such a powerful sorcerer! You know nothing about him and are too inexperienced! If he reflected the scry back at you, you should have been killed! Also, it typically takes hundreds of years to learn how to even scry the future What did you even see?!" Loki spat each word hurriedly, every bit as angry as Sesshomaru expected him to be. He had to be placated.
Sesshomaru narrowed his gaze and flashed his youki back, though weakened it was absorbed by Loki's aggressive magic.

'How unseemly. How dare Loki imply some sorcerer could defeat this Sesshomaru with his own technique?' Sesshomaru forced himself to forget how when he took his shower, his eyes widened in shock at the Other's name carved into his left arm. He had to use a great amount of youki to heal it.

"Hey, Loki you're getting magic in the potato salad, maybe turn it down a notch?" Barton was standing. Everyone was standing. What a scene.

"No. We deserve to know what's gotten Pretty Boy in such a funk over the future. If he saw something important about the invasion we need to know. " Romanoff clipped.

"Natasha is right." Rogers nodded and the Berserker huffed in response, as if not quite agreeing with his leader.

"Why did you attempt to scry him? What possessed you to attempt such a feat?!" Loki practically screeched, ignoring the other conversations happening simultaneously. Sesshomaru pooled toxin under his talons. How could Loki not know why he wanted to scry him?

"I did so because his actions incensed this Sesshomaru and I wished to gain detailed knowledge of his current position." Sesshomaru's voice engulfed the table with palpable malice, his youki flushed out his hands, red and shimmering.

Loki retreated, shoulders slumping in comprehension. His magic fading, both his red youki and Loki's black magic faded to a purple dust. The others around the table followed suit, leaning back.

"Sho, what did you see?" Loki pled, eyes now brimming with green magic. Sesshomaru out of his periphery saw Barton move around the table to Loki's side.

"Do not feel compelled to explain yourself to these humans and Gods! What you see is your own Lord Sesshomaru!" Jaken insisted. Sesshomaru agreed, however he doubted the humans would allow him any peace until they received a suitable answer.

'How irritating, Why do they care so much?' Sesshomaru's ears flattened and he cracked his knuckles. He strategized for the right approach. He would just have to tell them a portion of what he saw to the badgering humans. He would rather do it when Stark remained absent, he could be unerringly insightful and may conclude that he did not divulge the whole truth.

"Rin do not listen." Rin nodded nervously and put her fingers in her ears and hummed.

They all waited for him to struggle with the right words. Sesshomaru eventually found them.

"... I foresaw my own demise." Sesshomaru knew by saying that it should quell any more badgering by the humans. Loki was just now gaining their trust, and how could he explain Thor's betrayal? No one wants to hear their own end, especially ones as gruesome as the ones he foresaw. Especially by their own friends, he knew how that felt.

Was it his fate for everyone close to him to betray him? When he returned to his own realm, would Inuyasha eventually do so? Jaken? Rin?

Loki's magic ceased immediately. Everyone exhaled and shuffled he heard murmurs. He tapped Rin to indicate she could listen once more

"Oh, only that. Uplifting." Clint muttered under his breath, still standing next to Loki.
"Sho...that's not supposed to be possible. A seer cannot scry their own destiny." Loki said softly, eyes blank and Sesshomaru didn't have an answer for him, except he didn't just see the future, he was in it. He felt the pain, tasted the blood, heard Stark's scream. Sesshomaru wished to change the conversation back to the matter at hand.

"Lord Sesshomaru, you can't possibly be serio-" he gave a look to silence Jaken.

"Uncle Loki, can I go to the distant realm with you and Storm God?! I want to see your castle, and draw it for Lord Sesshomaru." Sesshomaru instantly set his jaw. To permit Rin to accompany Loki and Thor to the distant realm? When clearly in the future they had betrayed him? No, this was unacceptable. He wouldn't allow it.

"...of course Lady Rin! It would be an honor to show you Asgard. I am sure Mother and Allfather will warm to you instantly! Even Hogun will soften to you!" Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles. That Storm God! How dare he speak such things about Rin going to the distant realm! As if he could trust....then Sesshomaru saw the happy, excited look in Rin's eyes.

If he prohibited Rin from going with them, it would seem suspicious. Not only would it show that he didn't trust Loki or Thor, but it would also show that he didn't trust the distant realm either. He didn't want to get into an argument with Thor over his gaudy homeland ruled by their arrogant King.

"Can I go Lord Sesshomaru?! Please!" Rin smiled, Loki behind her was still pale with shock.

Pause. The whole table, aside from Thor, had trouble going back to the previous conversation.

"You may Rin. Behave and do not leave Loki's side." Sesshomaru relented and Rin hopped in glee. He thought about ordering Jaken to go with her, but he too would dislike the distant realm and surely get into some altercation. Sesshomaru had no wish to return to the distant realm, and knew that once there it would probably end with him fighting the half-blind Odin. He'd rather not depose a King, no matter how useless he was.

"That could work. Children heighten the emotional vulnerability of potentially hostile forces. Taking Rin with you to Asgard may help you in getting through to your father." Romanoff stated clinically, like she was reading a list of items.

"Odin is certainly not my father." Loki turned to Sesshomaru, assessing him. "We will speak more of your scrying, what you are doing is reckless and dangerous. We need to know more about what you saw." Loki insisted and Sesshomaru internally growled. He was correct about Loki's nagging.

"Yeah, what happened? Was it the Mad Titan, Thanos?" Rogers, good naturedly, but concerned asked and out of the corner of his eye he saw the Berserker hit him with a napkin. Rogers, reproached flung out his hands. Sesshomaru did not want to be the cause of an argument between the humans.

"I doubt he wants to discuss it in committee, Steve." Barton snapped, Sesshomaru swiveled his head towards the archer. He had not expected him to come his defense after his ruse with him and Loki.

"Son of Taisho, whatever you scryed do not fret, it must be untrue! You are a most powerful and capable warrior, one of the best I have ever fought beside." Thor lifted his chin and Sesshomaru's ears flicked up. Ironic words coming from his executioner. Sesshomaru narrowed his gaze suspiciously, was Thor playing dumb and coy with him? Did Thor secretly want nothing more than to end him? Was he capable of such underhanded tactics?
"Indeed." Sesshomaru muttered back. He had no idea what to do, for once. Should he trust Loki and Thor, or trust his abilities? Doubt his only friend, or doubt himself? Doubt both Loki and himself?

He heard the voices around the table begin to muddle and merge. He had to get out. He couldn't stay. His ears flattened and his knuckles cracked.

"...I must recharge the proximity barrier. I will return shortly. Rin stay with Jaken and behave." Sesshomaru refused to field any more questions, or be the target of any more attention.

And with a nod from Rin he leapt off the balcony, sans Tenseiga and Bakusaiga, still in his new human clothes, towards the center of the city where he placed the previous barrier's center.

'I am merely recharging the barrier. This Sesshomaru never runs.' Sesshomaru reached full speed, hair streaming behind him, aviators somehow staying on his head. His ears up, listening for the wind. He still couldn't hear her comforting voice murmur his name.

'Kagura...What should this Sesshomaru do?' He asked, even though he knew he would get no answer from the Wind Demoness he secretly still missed.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading this chapter, it was a bear to write!

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let me know how you like it

-TL
Tony and the New Hope

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony and the New Hope

*(*)

Tony a kick ass, shoot to thrill day. He and Bruce began to make Sesshomaru's toxin weapon viable. They had actually managed to successfully separate the compound, and produced two separate toxins. Tony wanted to name them Venom and Carnage but Bruce told him those were already taken.

It worked out; he thought of two even better ones.

He named the first toxin, which produced the potent neurotoxic effects in organic matter: Cerberus, and the hyper corrosive acid for inorganic matter: Sirius. Tony loved a good name, and he certainly thought Sesshomaru would appreciate the nod to the whole Dog Demon thing.

He was a naming genius. Mastermind. Savant.

Well…assuming that the beautiful time-travelling Demon Lord knew Greek mythology, and astronomy… Well, shit he could always just explain it. He had a lot of experience in one on one tutoring, especially when mixed with the subject of anatomy. MIT gave him a lot of opportunities to 'practice'.

It wasn't like Sailor Moon lacked in the intellect nor anatomical department either.

Speaking of that, he couldn't wait to show the pompous canine what he managed to chemically engineer once they were complete. It would totally blow his mind.

And they would make him think twice about studying documents on his own, and choosing to open up to Capsicle, of all people, about his brother who got pinned to a tree. Not that he was still sore by that. Tony made others sore, not the other way around.

Sometimes the looks he'd get from Bruce would make him want to reinforce that point.

He and Bruce now were in the testing stages for each toxin, trying to increase the potency of Cerberus and Sirius. So far, they had succeeded in making each marginally stronger separate than when they were together. They hoped to improve the results by the end of the week.

But, that wasn't even close to being the best part of his day.

In addition to the toxins, the youki sample Sesshomaru gave him produced a rather unpredictable result with his current suit, the Mark XLVI. The Mark XLVI suit was his forty-sixth suit that he had created in a ravenous panic of an anxiety induced workaholic binge.

He likened his binge creation period to Picasso's blue period. Pepper did always love curating that fine art gallery. Unlike, or who knows maybe like, Picasso's period his was punctuated with many a fine bottle of scotch.

Ultimately, and unsurprisingly to Rhodey, that was the cause of the demise of his relationship with
Pepper. Or whatever loose definition of the term 'relationship' any healthy human being would claim he had with her.

He should have really never attempted a romantic relationship with Pepper in the first place. He knew, deep down, it was a mistake. She didn't deserve a work-obsessed 'does-not-play-well-with-others' piping hot mess like himself. Really. But Tony had never claimed to be anything but selfish. He wanted it all, at his speed, on his terms.

'Capsicle was right, though I'd obviously never admit that out loud. Even when I carried the tactical nuclear warhead into space, I was being somewhat selfish.' Tony suddenly just then became the target of a 'What's wrong with you now? You should be happy' look from Pepper and he waved it off with a flick of his drink and a grin as Happy helped her into the car, Rhodey next to her.

He managed a warmer look than usual and Rhodey just put his head in his hands as the car door shut and the Bentley pulled away. He slipped back into his thoughts.

Though, his instincts at the time did tell him that perhaps letting 'the city that never sleeps, which also houses the genius that rarely does' get glassed was a horrifically bad idea, that wasn't what made him commit.

'I didn't save New York only for the ten million strangers that live here. I didn't save it knowing that the United States couldn't handle the beacon of their country being sent to the bronze era. I saved it for Pepper, for Rhodes, for me, and yes, partly for the other Avengers, specifically Bruce and Natasha. It's my home.' Tony turned on his heel and made his way back up to the penthouse of the tower, oblivious of Sesshomaru leaping away as a white blur above.

He saved New York because deep down, it was in his own best interests to do so. His lungs stung like he actually inhaled cigar smoke whenever someone called him a hero. Ugh. Hero. What was this, a comic book?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, he had the argument with Steve about the laying down on a wire for someone, and instead clipping it on the helicarrier. He hadn't changed that mentality. Because truthfully, he had held on to the fantastical belief that his suit would have held out better. He was Tony Stark and it was his finest suit.

But it hadn't.

And that void. That gaping, horrifying mouth that swallowed him only to vomit him out like a bad night of drinking haunted him. If he had to do everything again, he would have done it probably exactly the same. Probably. Maybe he could have figured out an alternative…but if he couldn't he would have done the same thing. Except without his well-honed cocksure belief that of course he would turn out alright.

Because while he survived the improbable, coming out 'alright' was certainly a relative term.

If he thought that coming back from Afghanistan, Obie betraying him, or his own previous brush with death in Monaco would be the worst his warped psyche would endure he was mistaken.

His mind slipped closer to the edge of a tangle of PTSD breakdowns. The silent void of space, the choked voice of JARVIS, the warmth of the missile, the sight of that looming armada just overwhelmed him. It was too much. His chest dense as lead, the shortness of breath towards his end made him want an escape, stability, a solace. He found his escape in drinking, his stability in tinkering, and his solace in Pepper.
Tony, by nature, distrusted and hated self-reflection. However, whenever he saw his suits, it sprouted it in him. His suits reflected his mentality at the time he made them.

'I had a reason why the Mark XLVI had more dark-red panneling, why it had more menacing lines. Beefier armor. Sleek is out, security is in. Defense is always the best offense. Defense wins games. It should also get the point across that I'm not the hero people sometimes laud me to be. Super heroes trend towards all those showy, gaudy golds, silvers, blues, hot-rod red. I'm just not one, I'm just trying to protect who matters the most to me.' Tony took another deep sip of his second gin tonic.

Tony couldn't, at first, figure out why exactly he hadn't relapsed with a panic attack when his magic signature detector pinged in New Mexico. He had even been sleeping more than two hours a night! He figured if anything would trigger one it would be Loki showing up with another promise of extra-terrestrial Armageddon.

It took him putting on the Mark XLVI today for it all to piece together.

He put on the suit in his lab to test if he could potentially add Cerberus or Sirius to the repulsors. He knew he could easily weaponize them both to cartridges and arrows.

What he didn't expect was the youki that raced up his arm and into his arc reactor earlier that morning actually had harmonized with the arc reactor and subsequently incorporated itself into the suit.

Him. Tony Stark harmonizing with something that wasn't a single malt or a computer system. His rebellious arc reactor was resonating with Sailor Moon's Demonic energy. Facinating and at the same time, a bit terrifying.

The youki pulsed and tingled in his chest and through his suit all the way to his toes. Tinged somewhere else too. Tony pushed that sensation reluctantly out of his mind. It was official, the Demon Lord was mayhem.

He wasn't just attracted to Sesshomaru aesthetically, his arc reactor and the Demon Lord's youki had started to integrate! Christ, how did this go unnoticed?!

Or maybe noticed and he just brushed it off?

Bruce just laughed at him. Ass.

Jarvis naturally ran a diagnostic, Bruce grinning on the edge of his seat. Jarvis reported back that the positively charged ions in the youki, similar to an electrical storm, caused the surge in power, but the long wavelengths caused it to stabilize. It acted just like how he thought the youki would when he analyzed it a week ago.

This had been going on gradually since Sailor Moon arrived, the outfit just jumpstarted it.

His suit had off the chart power readings, almost exactly like when Point Break struck him with lightning way back when. Only this was a lot more stable, and... somehow controllable. But that made sense... lightning produced positively charged ions... Sailor Moon's youki was positively charged.

Tony then decided to conduct a delicate, highly sensitive test of his new found power.

He shot a test dummy. And damn it was a sight.
Which, while rewarding watching his repulsors light up red and hit at approximately 331% percentage of power, it only ended up in getting his entire lab foamed by Dum-e who he brought from Malibu. Again. So. Once was enough. Bruce wasn't impressed with his impulse control issues. Like he could talk. He once leveled Harlem.

But seriously, what did Bruce expect? It's like having an Audi R8 and expecting him to want go to the speed limit. Or having a dangerously sexy Demon Lord living in his tower and expecting him not to want to jump his bones.

In fact, now he had an excuse for being attracted to the Demon Lord. It literally wasn't even his fault, his mentality, or anything deep seeded like that. The arc reactor, the crowned jewel of his inventions, which Sesshomaru actually called a jewel once, went rogue. He could be vindicated of any personal responsibility of his raunchy dreams, desires and callings towards the calm, silver haired Demon who only smiled for him. Well, and Rin.

Absolved completely. Not his fault at all. He was being manipulated by his own invention. It's totally not his fault that he mentally inventoried his shirtless pointy-eared body deep into his 'spank bank' archive. The arc reactor was to blame that he worked overtime to get the com'rin'acator working just to get a positive reaction.

Yeah. His smile, that was the best part of his day. But it wasn't his fault it was.

Tony even punched the air in victory when his translator invention worked well enough. He may even be able to mass produce them if he managed to get the kinks worked out. Or, you know, if they managed to stave off world domination from a psychotic warlord who already tortured a powerful Demigod he knew well.

Dour thoughts be damned. He still glowed with excitement about the second small smile he got from the normally stoic Demon Lord when Rin could understand what Bruce said.

'I can see why he doesn't smile much. They could stop New York City traffic, maybe even a Chitauri invasion.' Tony chuckled.

'I just wished he had been more talkative at dinner. He looked bored or distracted or both, he didn't even say anything snarky about me listing all his nicknames when introducing him to Rhodey. Thought for sure that was worth some retort!' Tony rubbed his beard as he exited the elevator. Maybe he should have made him play the question game again, but he didn't want to have to explain Sesshomaru and Loki until Rhodey got a beer or two in him and full.

Though his 'son of a bitch' comment sure didn't help. The sulky Demon took what he said about the Chitauri personally. He needed to just loosen up. Of course he'd take what he said the complete wrong way. Again.

Not that Tony cared if he offended him, he had offended probably thousands of people and remorse never spiked in his chest. It was Sesshomaru's fault he was so offended. Tony responding the way he did to Loki had to be because of youki in his arc reactor. Yet, why did he feel a needle of remorse?

'Not because I cared that the hard glare he shot my way also had a hint of incredulity embedded in it. Like I could possibly see the only person on the planet who could intrigue me this thoroughly on the same level as those backwater space hicks.' Tony undid the top button on his charcoal grey button up, feeling a bit hot.

The same backwater space hicks who Rhodey who got his American flag boxers in a knot about.
The grand reveal, which of course Loki went full diva for, ended up ultimately better than Tony thought it would. No one was dead, his tower still stood, and most importantly there wasn't a tact squad outside from a government he didn't trust in the slightest trying to detain him.

Tony would have bet his vintage Shelby Cobra that Rhodey would shoot actually shoot Loki. He was glad he learned his lesson and didn't actually take Natasha up on that bet. Though the only reason Rhodey didn't may have been mostly due to Rin sitting in his lap like she was listening to Santa Claus. It had come as quite a surprise to him that she referred to Loki as 'Uncle'.

Definitely the 'black-sheep-of-the-family' uncle.

Sesshomaru's impersonation of Legolas throwing what was left of his fork into Rhodey's gun like a ninja made him almost choke on his own tongue.

Despite that Sailor Moon didn't look like Rhodey's biggest fan, he couldn't help but feel a warm, stout smugness at Sesshomaru's indirect compliment of his intelligence, 'You have ears and if you are Stark's comrade, most likely a brain between them…' made his heart skid to a brief stop.

So he did think he was a genius. Not that it was ever in doubt but it was always good to be praised. Especially from someone who doled out praise like Fury doled out foot rubs. He couldn't acknowledge it at the time though, he had to show Rhodey the video of Loki turning into a Christmas tree and their spar. Rhodey wasn't too thrilled about the situation. Neither was he. But, deep down, they did both fear another attack ever since he slipped through the portal.

Fury was right about one thing, even though Thor and the rest of Asgard wanted peace with Earth, it didn't mean that other dimensions and civilizations did.

Rhodey was so shocked he left his jammed Beretta behind when he left with Pepper. He couldn't blame him for that. Rhodey probably didn't want a reminder of this night while he processed that the worse was yet to come. Tony, however, brimmed with confidence. The Avengers were united, they had time, they had a secret weapon, he had a brand new suit, and they had inside knowledge. They'd be ready.

Tony downed his drink with a solid clink on the bartop and with confidence and optimism fueling his stride he swept out for an update on 'Operation: Seduce Fury'.

Though when Tony walked back into the dinner party the atmosphere was grim. What?

"Hey, who died in here? Didn't know I so integral to the party." Tony asked and received a smattering of glares, coughs and awkward as hell glances. 'Don't tell me someone actually died, I leave for like, a half hour and the party crashes. Just like MIT.' Tony scanned the crowd.

Sesshomaru was missing, Loki looked like he just got tossed by the Hulk, Clint stood beside Loki but faced away from everyone else. Nat was furiously typing something in her phone and Thor appeared to actually be thinking about something.

Steve looked like someone kicked his dog. Jaken was also letting Rin poke him with a fork.

'Shit. What did I miss here? I leave these guys for like ten minutes…' Tony began to make his way to the table, picking up a grape and popping it into his mouth casually.

"Um. Tony, well...good news is we got a pretty good plan for Fury. Loki, Thor, Natasha, and Rin are going to Asgard to talk to Heimdall about the location of the invading fleet. We decided bringing Fury here to inform him of what's going on is a good plan. Maybe we should get more crabs…" Bruce cleared his throat, obviously masking something.
"Good. Love home court advantage. Taking the crowned 'Miss Spy Universe', and Little Miss Sunshine will help grumpy Allfather hopefully not try to lock up Bambi again. Operation: Seduce Fury sounds underway, what's the bad news? This sounds pretty solid." Tony rambled, vying for any sort of positive reaction, also trying to not crane his neck too obviously for the missing Demon Lord.

Jaken slapped his hands over Rin's ears.

"Lord Sesshomaru scryed his own demise and you filthy humans and troublesome Gods barged into business that was not your own! Even that Mischief God's magic went haywire forcing him recharge the proximity barrier! I knew coming to this realm would be the end of us all!" Jaken's youki raised as he ranted. He then released Rin's ears and she looked around.

'So that's why my Bambi finder doesn't work, and why Fury can't find him either! Sailor Moon has been hiding him this whole time. And he didn't even tell me!' Tony's mind whirred, he had to get his own proximity barrier up, but then he realized he had other things to deal with first. Like a missing, high-maintenance, Demon Lord.

No wonder Sailor Moon left the party early, obviously it got to be a bit TMI.

'That's...a lot to digest. No wonder he was in such a broody mood.' Tony's lungs tightened. 'He probably didn't see himself dying of old age in Boca Raton wearing a tacky hawaiian shirt and sperry boat shoes either.' Tony put his hand to his temple.

"He did that scry thing again?! I mean Christ, And you let him just take off? You are all really classy. Stay put, I'll go bring Lassie back. Jarvis get my suit ready." Tony heard someone say something but he didn't really care, he headed out to the balcony like a man on fire and when his suit assembled he was in the air. He couldn't let Sesshomaru go all sulky and alone. Where was the fun in that?

He wasted no time in activating his youki locator, though it was soon to be unnecessary. He then saw a flash of shimmering blue youki high in the air, the proximity barrier. He put his thrusters on full and headed to the epicenter of the glittering blue youki snowing down: The Chrysler Building.

"Sir he appears to be sitting on the antennae." Tony nodded and flew out, it didn't take him long to spot the silver hair whipping in the air. He looked small wearing human clothes, without his swords perched this high up. He stared out at the Hudson with perfect posture, pursing his lips tensely like a human would.

It was then Tony noticed that Sesshomaru hadn't noticed his approach. He was wearing headphones, probably not listening to AC/DC.

Tony swooped out in front to catch his attention, and to hack his i-pod to play 'Shoot to Thrill'. That fixed that.

'And put your hand out to me, cause I'm the one who's gonna make you burn. I'm gonna take you down.' It was worth seeing the shocked look on Sailor Moon's face. Shocked of course, on Sesshomaru meant his eyes widened slightly.

"Hey, Sailor Moon, it's poor form to leave a frat party before they play Journey, or Semisonic's, Closing Time." Tony swung out to face him, his gaze neutral, but distant. He didn't respond at all to his joke, not even an ear twitch or a blink. The only thing that moved was his hair, thrashing out in all directions, catching all the fading sunlight like a candle flame.
He simply took the earbuds out of his ears. His ears pointed low on his head.

"Want company?" Tony offered and Sesshomaru didn't respond except with a flick of a gaze to his left. Probably Sesshomaru for 'sure knock yourself out.' He took as one anyway and sat next to him on the surprising thick antenna pole. He flipped up his face shield.

Sesshomaru's mouth remained a thin line on his face and Tony felt he had plunged truly out of his depth.

No one said anything for a while.

"So, I gotta say, if you keep running away from home I'm gonna have to give you a name tag and write my address on it. Maybe microchip you or something." Tony attempted humor, Sesshomaru unfazed, pointed up with his left hand.

Tony, however, didn't fixate on the long, clawed finger nor the direction it pointed in, but his wrist. The dark magenta stripes that slashed across the thin column of ivory smooth skin called to him.

He resisted the ravenous urge to grab it again just barely.

"I needed to recharge my proximity barrier to continue blocking Loki's magic from being detected, and in case... Rhodey decided to lead an assault on your fortress." Sesshomaru sighed, a real sigh. Tony rocked back, for all his hijinks to get Sesshomaru to emote, he really didn't like it when he did it like this.

He sounded almost defeated. But it did amuse Tony that Sesshomaru thought 'Rhodey' was Rhodes' real name.

"Ok, well you don't have to worry him, he is on board and isn't going to predator drone strike my tower. Oh and yeah, not buying it was the only reason you left. Nothing is so urgent that you leave your precious swords, N*sync and Backstreet Boy behind on purpose. You just bolted after Loki got mad you put yourself in danger again." Tony called his bluff edging him again for any reaction. Tony knew he was particularly sensitive when it came to his sword's names.

Sesshomaru visibly stiffened and turned to Tony, eyes bright orange from the setting sun. His glare could have shattered crystal and Tony, while almost losing his balance and his heart skipping a beat, smirked in victory at getting the Demon Lord back on track.

"Do not presume so know so much about this Sesshomaru." Tony groaned, not this 'formal I speak in the third person' bullshit again. He only did this when he was uneasy, defensive, or pissy. At least he hit the nail on the head.

'God I suck at this. How do you comfort a Demon Lord who on average emotes as much as a slab of marble? Should I buy him a beer? I should have paid attention in those therapist sessions Pepper made me go to.' Tony began to think of lines to say. But all he could think of, oddly, were apology lines one would say to making a lover angry: 'I swear; I'll never do it again...I'll do better...Yes, I know its unhealthy when...’ The responses that came to mind told him volumes about his previous therapy sessions.

It was then it dawned on Tony just exactly what he was trying to do.
Comfort someone.

Was this real life? What sort of joke was life playing on him now? When did he ever do something like this? Tony couldn't even tell Pepper he was dying years ago out of fear of having to comfort her.

"I won't allow it." Sesshomaru stated, voice low. Tony turned to him, wondering if he missed something or he just had to pull the context from thin air. Oh, yeah the scrying seeing the future thing.

"I can change the future. I will behead the Mad Titan personally and achieve unparalleled greatness." Sesshomaru's voice reached a gravelly huskiness that aroused Tony more than he cared to admit. With only a slight hesitation, put his armored hand, boldly, on his shoulder.

He instantly wished he wasn't wearing his suit, so he could really feel his broad, yet lanky shoulder beneath him. Tony craved to absorb the warmth from his white shirt, to really know if his lats were as suspension bridge wire taut as he thought.

Tony vowed he'd find out sooner or later.

"Hey, you're a part of a team now. You got me, the rest of the Avengers, Toady, and your unbalanced bestie. You aren't alone in this. This isn't solely on your shoulders no matter how Loki originally spun it. In a surprising turn of events, we trust what he says. And you know only went ape-shit because you give him heart attacks on a daily basis." Tony held his breath as Sesshomaru turned, lips slightly parted, like when he carried him. Face alight, the sunset haloed him making him look afire.

Tony, somehow, dug deep and resisted the urge to claim those lips with his own. All Sesshomaru did was break eye contact to look down and reflexively Tony caressed his shoulder with his thumb absent.

"You aren't used to the team thing are you? Loki filled us in some as you know." Tony found words coming to him more naturally. He was gradually getting in his element.

"No." Sesshomaru replied slowly, eyebrows raising with his ears. To Tony, his response was his version of stating the obvious. Tony grinned.

"Well, get used to it, for better or worse we are all roped into this. And get used to everyone harassing you. Especially Loki. Despite the like five hundred years you've been apart you're still the Spock to his Kirk. Which, uh, means that you two are partners who explore space and fight aliens. That diva will always have your back." Tony laughed at Sesshomaru's confusion at his analogy, he had to make Sesshomaru watch Star Trek at some point, at least the movies. He'd totally get the Spock reference. Yet, Tony became confused when Sesshomaru's eyes widened.

"You truly believe so? You trust in Loki's loyalty towards me?" Tony stopped rubbing his shoulder, and he hadn't really realized he had kept doing it. This was well beyond the 'manly comforting' thing. Tony knew whatever Sesshomaru scryed had to be bad. Since when did 'Mr. I'm above all humans' need reassurance from one about his best friend no less?

"There are several things I am certain of in life: one Justin Hammer is a giant tool, no pun intended, two, AC/DC is the best band, not sorry Kurt Cobain, three, Loki would take a Mjolnir blast to his family jewels for you. I believe what I can study, so don't...believe any LSD vision quest you saw over fact." Tony listed, he hoped that he wouldn't run into Justin Hammer anytime soon. He got released from prison two and half years ago due to 'overcrowding'. Maybe he could get Sailor
"Mmmm." Sesshomaru hummed simply, voice like velvet. Tony finally saw his sharp jaw relax and he wanted to hold it and jerk it towards him. To roughly open his mouth and shove his tongue down into it.

Though he was still wearing the damned gloves, the relaxing of Sesshomaru's lats beneath his shoulder didn't go unnoticed.

"You didn't just see your death, did you?" Tony braved, he didn't know if he was about to strike out or hit a home run. Sesshomaru shook his head, bangs ruffling in the wind.

"I saw many, among other events." Sesshomaru stated, voice stoic and deep looking away, as if trying to see beyond the horizon.

Tony, for a moment, wanted to know just how sharp his chin really felt. Sesshomaru's facial features cut just too acutely to be human, his skin too smooth, his hair too polished. His gold eyes, with the slit pupils, which at first struck an instinctual, biologically based fear in him, now just made sense with the rest of his thin, pointed self. Delicate nor fragile could accurately describe the apex predator. Yet, the way his features cleaved, his lithe frame, his lethal talons, depicted something meant for only offense, something that burned brightly and didn't last.

A glass cannon.

"Did you see mine?" Goddamnit Tony. 'Way to be sensitive. I should have brought Pepper.' Tony wanted to kick himself in the ass.

"Yes." Sesshomaru's whisper almost got caught by the wind.

"My death is the real tragedy. I'm pretty famous here, kind of a big deal. There'd be parades everywhere. The whole world would be in mourning for years, especially the women, I get around. They'd be throwing their panties on my casket, men would write countless biographies about me. Bands would be started, good ones. I'd get a national holiday, no a global holiday! Even observed in North Korea." Tony rambled and Sesshomaru turned to him, eyebrows slanted in skepticism.

"...you have bedded no human female since I have arrived." Sesshomaru's crimson lidded eyes crinkled and Tony shot up, taking his hand from his shoulder in offense.

"What? How would you know? You were gone for three days and live in my basement like a moody college drop-out!" Tony flailed, not expecting to be called out on his dry streak by the stoic Demon Lord.

"I can smell such things, and Jarvis informed me of everyone's comings and goings." Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side. Jarvis that traitor.

"Sorry sir, he asked this morning." Jarvis butted in.

"God you are so fucking creepy. And weird. Jarvis you're fired. You, Sailor Moon, literally keep your nose out of my business." Tony flipped his face plate on to hide what was probably an obvious blush. He saw Sesshomaru tilt his head back slightly, as if listening for something.

"This Sesshomaru is not creepy and my actions are within reason. Your opinions of me are skewed, human." Sesshomaru retorted, Tony caught that Sesshomaru didn't sound nearly as moody as before, another Tony Stark success.
"Says the guy who melts silverware into ninja weapons, barters for ice cream with music, and sits on top of The Chrysler Building probably listening to emo music on the way here. You're. Weird."

Tony flipped his face plate back up, not really wanting to talk to him through it.

"This Sesshomaru was listening to the wind while running." Tony face palmed, of course he'd get all cryptic again.

"Ok Pocahontas, what music were you listening to before I played AC/DC?" Tony fired back and Sesshomaru glanced back, a slight smirk on his lips. He didn't care if Sesshomaru didn't catch his Disney reference.

"That is an inquiry this Sesshomaru did not consent to answer." Holy hell this guy is so high maintenance.

"Christ you're such a pain. Fine. Ask me a question, but answer mine first." Tony relented, secretly enjoying it.

"I was listening to the Airborne Toxic Event." Oh, well that explained everything.

"Wow. Even the band name is depressing. Don't going to start dying your hair strange colors, well stranger colors, and wearing lace up black combat boots." Tony joked and hooked a lock of Sesshomaru's hair, wishing he could actually feel the satin strands on the pads of his fingers.

"This Sesshomaru will not change his person, and prefers his own boots…Do you know of a land of flat, white salt near a building of tall white spires?" Tony made a face. Sesshomaru hesitated asking the question which had to mean it was important or personal or both. Why would he want to go to the Bonneville Salt Flats? Did he want to break a world record speed test? Tony smirked, a plan forming.

"Yeah. I do." Tony baited, smirking smugly. Sesshomaru waited for an elaboration that wouldn't come.

Pause.

"In which direction would it be?" Sesshomaru finally asked a second question. Tony struck back.

"Now that's a question I didn't give consent to answer." Tony quipped back, chin high. Sesshomaru frowned deeply, brow creasing. "What, it's not my fault you didn't correctly pose the question you wanted to ask." Tony supplemented airily. Sesshomaru tossed his windblown hair, ears flicking up then down, obviously irritated. Prissy Demon. Tony knew if he asked why he wanted to know he wouldn't get an answer. So he wouldn't, at least not right now.

Tony just loved it when he won.

"Let's get back before Loki thinks we eloped or something." Sesshomaru's mouth drawstringed small, as if the joke truly confused him. Maybe it did. Tony reveled in irking and confusing the Demon. Anything was better than dejected, emo sighing Sailor Moon.

There really wasn't much space between them. They could be sitting side by side in his R8, in which he would just lean over the center console, grab the back of his head, and maul his mouth senseless. Instead, he shook the thought from his head literally and put on his face plate.

Together, side by side with Tony flying and Sesshomaru leaping, they arrived back at Stark Tower with everyone already around the big screen TV. Movie night.
'I bet it was Steve's idea for team building. At least it was a better idea than a trust fall.' Tony allowed the suit to fold up and collapse off his body before entering the room.

"Hey you're just in time for the Star Wars movie. A New Hope! I haven't seen it yet! Clint says we have to watch the fourth one first." Steve announced with popcorn, which always smelled better than it tasted. Tony quirked an eyebrow. It was an oddly appropriate choice considering the impending invasion. He sat on the sofa, on Steve's left, the only empty seat to his own right.

He could have sworn he saw Sesshomaru glare at Clint and Loki, who sat side by side, but in separate chairs. Sesshomaru with inhuman grace sat down next down next to Tony.

"Is this for tactical purposes?" Sesshomaru inquired to Loki and Natasha laughed.

"It's for entertainment. I was informed it is a fictional series of events that hold no clear useful battle strategies." Loki informed from across the room, eyes glinting.

"He asked the same question." Clint clarified. Tony rolled his eyes. Figures Bambi and Sailor Moon would not get the concept of R&R.

"Lord Sesshomaru it's supposed to be fun!" Rin ran into the room holding more popcorn and sat on the floor cross-legged in front of Sesshomaru. Jaken was suspiciously absent.

The movie played, and upon the insistence of mostly Rin, Thor and Steve, they also played the sequel The Empire Strikes Back. Tony restrained himself well. He tried hard not to show that he tingled with satisfaction that Sesshomaru sat next to him. Tony would have made some excuse to sit next to him anyway, especially if he sat next to Clint.

Clint and Sesshomaru at dinner were getting a little too friendly for his tastes. Clint even hit on him! Supermodel figure, what was that about?!

'Whoa, Tony…cool your jets, it's not like I care. Stupid life-saving, youki-merging, arc reactor. This better not have any crazy long term effects.' Tony crossed his legs, an excuse for his and Sesshomaru's knees to touch.

Tony didn't mind at all when Sesshomaru's leg brushed against his, and stayed there, sharing in the body heat. Or when their shoulders touched when Tony adjusted. Or even when Sesshomaru's obscenely long hair got all over him when he shifted his back so now their shoulders were flush against each other. His silver hair was splayed all over the whole sofa. He swore he saw Steve brush some off him. However, the almost unbearable inch and a half of space between them had been extinguished. Worth it.

He would have to buy a Roomba. Maybe a Roomba team, have them line change like in ice hockey. He could number them. Tony swore Clint watched hockey. Maybe he knew of a good team.

When the movie stopped, Tony was ready for his master plan. He had Jarvis get him paper and pens during the break between movies. He stood up, slightly reluctantly. He had gotten pretty strangely comfortable for sharing a sofa with two full grown men.

"So. Bets. Let's say twenty dollars. Let's try to guess Reindeer Games' and Sailor Moon's favorite characters. Let's start with Reminder Games! Oh and you two," Tony pointed to Sesshomaru and Loki "You aren't in on the bet, that'd be practically cheating, but you can play, you just have to announce after everyone else." Tony announced and Sesshomaru straightened. He ignored Bruce's knowing smirk. He could be too smart for his own good.
Tony handed out the paper and pens and everyone wrote down a character, putting it in the empty popcorn bowl. Loki fully stretched out like a cat, smiled like one too, clearly entertained.

"Ok, so for Reindeer Games, we got two votes Darth Vader, three votes Boba Fett, one vote Yoda...really Steve, Yoda?" Tony called out like a sports announcer. Steve gave his best 'What?!' face.

'His is totally the Fett. Scary, loner, gets shit done, uses all sorts of tricks and is the only one to figure out where the Millennium Falcon goes.' Tony knew he, Clint and Natasha had this one in the bag.

"While all interesting guesses you are all wrong." Loki stated haughtily. Tony nearly threw the bowl at him to wipe that look off his face. He didn't miss Clint's shocked reaction either.

"What?! How can it not be Boba Fett? He wears green, plays by his own rules, and not even Darth Vader intimidates him!" Clint exclaimed, clearly exasperated.

"You asked for my favorite character, not the one perhaps most like myself." Loki responded, wagging a finger in admonishment to Clint who just groaned deeply. Pfft stupid clever Diva God.

"Ok, valid point, then who?" Natasha responded and Loki held up his paper, which on it had written: R2D2.

"The droid?!" Clint asked looking to Loki who smiled satisfactorily.

"He is the most underestimated member of the team, and often the most humorous and intelligent. He is the only reason that buffoon Luke and that cringe worthy c-3PO are alive. He repairs the Falcon's hyperdrive as well, clinching their retreat from the Star Destroyer Executor. He is often gallant and doesn't let just anyone order him about." Loki responded and Sesshomaru nodded. On Sesshomaru's paper he had written, in the most crazy-pretty calligraphy Tony had ever seen, 'the small blue robot, or the only rebel pilot of any skill.' Tony pointed to Sesshomaru, all eyes now on him.

"Wait, who do you mean the only good pilot?! Both Han Solo and Luke are great, even Chewy." Tony asked as Bruce took the paper from behind Sesshomaru.

"Whoa, you have really nice handwriting, here everyone, check it out." Bruce passed the paper around. Tony heard murmurs of approval.

"No silly, Lord Sesshomaru means Wedge!" Rin responded, drawing on her paper, Loki as Boba Fett. Tony looked to Sesshomaru and threw up his hands in defeat. Wedge Antilles, what did he ever do?!

"The character Antilles is clearly the most skilled pilot, and was correct about the computer being unable to hit the target. The only reason their mission succeeded in the first film was due to Skywalker's magic, not his piloting abilities. The pilot Antilles had to distract and shoot Skywalker's pursuer in order for him to destroy the enemy space station. In the second film he was a commendable leader and only successful pilot against the walking devices. Since he operated as a support pilot and was often underestimated, and taken for granted, I would think Loki would favor and relate to him." Sesshomaru said more than he had all day, maybe all week. Tony didn't care what he had to say, he was glad Sailor Moon was back.

Loki flipped over his paper to reveal he too written Wedge. Clint took the paper from his hands in disbelief.
"Your handwriting isn't bad either. Like I said, arts and crafts at summer camp for the privileged and powerful worked." Barton passed Loki's paper around, getting the same murmurs of approval. Loki flashed a satisfied smile.

"Ok, you two, Sesshoki, are officially psychic. You guys should go on some newlywed game show, you'd never lose. They'd have to name the show after you." Tony looked at them both, noticing Loki was smirking and Sesshomaru didn't look uncomfortable so they are back on good terms. Tony liked it when everything returned to equilibrium.

"Brother, I commend of your choices. Both are fine examples of heroism!" Thor gave a thumbs up and Loki gave his best 'OK thanks.' face.

"I got mine for Sesshomaru." Bruce announced, passing his guess forward. The rest followed suit. Tony knew he had this one in the bag. There could only be one character Sesshomaru would absolutely go for.

"Oohh no repeats for this one! One vote Darth Vader, one Lando, One Chewbacca, one Princess Leia, one Obi Wan Kenobi, and lastly Han Solo." Tony said with a flourish and he spotted Loki rolling his eyes dramatically. Stuff it Bambi, he got this one right.

Tony could feel the cash in his hand. Lando was perfect. classy ruler, ends up helping his best friend, handsome, smart, and outsmarts the empire with a good tactic.

"...all false." Tony almost dropped the bowl. Everyone turned to Sesshomaru whose eyes widened. 'Still not quite used to the sudden turn of attention, total introvert.' Tony concluded.

"Really?! Not princess Leia who got tortured and only after they threatened to destroy an innocent planet gave up the plans then defeated them?" Steve looked almost hurt.

"I put Chewbacca, crossbows are awesome." Clint leaned back putting his hands behind his head.

"I believe they wanted Sesshomaru's favorite not yours." Loki glanced sideways.

"The earlier dart into Rhodes gun? Had to chance it. Besides, Chewbacca should be everyone's favorite." Clint retorted and Loki slowly facepalmed in return.

"I give up. You are impossible. Who is your favorite?! Jabba? Don't say Aunt Peru or the damn Jawas." Tony sat back down looking into Sesshomaru's eyes which were backlit with amusement. He showed his paper.

"I knew it!" Loki showed his paper, eyes bright in victory. Tony swore if they had the same answer…

Both said Admiral Piett.

Pause.

"Who?!" Everyone save Rin and Bruce asked.

"He was basically the only imperial officer not to get force choked by Darth Vader." Bruce explained, leaning back, exhaling through his nose. Bruce reacted like he knew he should have put down this nameless third tier garbage character.

"Yeah! He is smart! Though Rin's favorite character is Lando! Does that count?" Tony couldn't help but smile at that. Yeah, Lando being Rin's favorite made a lot more sense.
"Admiral Piett isn't even a real character. He probably says two wor…oh nevermind. I get it. I give up. I can't win." Tony put his head in his hands, Sesshomaru would pick a character with less lines than the Adidas logo.

"Why him?" Natasha asked, genuinely interested.

"He is a loyal, capable Captain of their flagship, the Executor. He brought the intelligence of the rebels to his general, despite the ineptitude of his superior officer. When his general Vader executes his superior officer in front of him and in turn promotes him to Admiral, he remains composed and does not disrespect him. A sign of true strength and nobility." Sesshomaru leaned back, rolling his neck back fluidly, like an Egyptian pharaoh would.

"He salvaged a tactical disadvantage out of that imbecile Ozzel's miscalculations giving away their positioning on Hoth. He even had the better tactic than Vader of avoiding the asteroid field when pursuing the Falcon. It is clear that the emotional liability who is Vader spares him because he did everything he correct in that situation, and is an invaluable Admiral." Loki added with a point Sesshomaru's direction.

"Indeed. I also agree with his voiced distaste for mercenaries when the bounty hunters were summoned to find the Millennium Falcon. I would employ him." Sesshomaru nodded, ears up, as if taunting Tony. Ok, so tie game, one point Tony, one point Sesshomaru.

"Figures they managed to actually turn these movies into a tactics analysis. Return of the Jedi will be a hoot." Clint groaned, Tony was with him. No post-tactics analysis from ESPN's Sesshomaru Gruden and Loki Tirico.

"You know, I can see where they both come from, the minor characters in the movies really were intelligent too." Steve looked like he had an epiphany.

"Yeah. They have their merits, I could see Fury hiring Piett, and Wedge." Natasha admitted casually, looking towards Loki.

"Ok, Ok you know let's all move on. It's confirmed Sesshoki are hipsters apparently only like obscure characters from movies." Tony couldn't help but feel an edge of envy. Those two were like, stupid close, almost like perfect compliments to each other.

Again, for like the eleventh time that day, not that he cared.

Bruce got up and turned on the lights as well as everyone else, and Tony watched as Loki made his way to Sesshomaru and put up his hand.

And Tony's jaw nearly fell out of his head when Sesshomaru high-fived it.

"Brother! Son of Taisho! That was indeed a proper time for a high five!" Thor. Actually. Clapped. What was this a Hallmark channel straight to TV movie?

'I'm surprised they don't have a secret hand shake. Stupid God of Mischief, stupid Demon Lord. I need a drink.' Tony grumbled, turning away from the both of them.

"Yay! Rin wants one Uncle Loki!" Loki high-fived Rin, who picked up her sketch of him as Boba Fett and Loki nodded and smiled in approval.

"Hey Loki, Fancy Pants, Tony we are all gonna go out for a drink for the grand Asgard homecoming, want in?" Clint said as the rest all headed towards the elevator. Tony could get behind that idea. He knew the perfect bar.
"If you insist upon my presence, then I suppose I will capitulate and join you." Loki, at his height of arrogance, made Clint throw out his hand in revulsion.

"Yeah, just give me a minute. Let me set my cap and look my prettiest." Tony wanted to talk to Sesshomaru about the Salt Flats, and the scry now that he was back to his normal placid self. They all, except Loki went down the elevator.

"Rin, it is time to retire." Sesshomaru informed mildly. Tony then jumped to intercept them.

"Yeah, and sorry, remember no more substorage room 3-b. There is a perfectly good room up here that has furniture that isn't crates. Pepper picked it all out, she insists Rin has a real bed. " Tony scratched his head and pointed with a flourish to the room. Loki sighed.

"Fine Stark. The storage room has outlived its purpose anyway." Loki put his hand on his hips in fake exasperation, mischief dancing hidden in his eyes.

"I will go retrieve Tenseiga, Bakusaiga, and Jaken." Sesshomaru stated, listing all three as if they were all actual people, and Rin followed him to the elevator with the rest. Tony decided to wait for him to come back up, and turned to the kitchen.

Tony was surprised when a strong arm pulled him into his own bedroom, Loki looked as serious as a plane crash. Green magic coiled and snaked on the floor, his eyes icy flecks of matching green. The strength of the grip on his arm shocked Tony. Ok?

"Stark. You must keep an eye on Sesshomaru while I am in Asgard. He. Must. Not. Scry. He knows not of what he is doing and is too stubborn to back down. What he is doing could easily kill him, or render him mindless. What he scryed earlier today is not even supposed to be possible!" Loki hissed venomously, shoving Tony roughly up against the wall with a dull thud. Loki definitely was stronger than he looked, Tony winced.

Tony's lungs flared, colossally annoyed. Loki was getting too physical.

"Why don't you teach him then? Scrying is magic right? Or I don't know take him Asgard and have someone show him." Tony shoved back. Hard. Loki stumbled back in surprise. No one pinned Tony Stark to the wall in his own bedroom. If it was so important why didn't Loki just help him?

"Because I am not a skilled in the art of scrying! I think that travelling through time in Bifrost triggered his gift. I don't even know anyone personally who is as powerful at it as Sesshomaru is except Frigga. Who, as you could possibly surmise, is in no mood to assist a scorned fugitive of Asgard!" Loki retaliated and shoved Tony again against the wall with a louder thud, holding him there. His grip tight like industrial vices. Tony found himself caving, to Loki's demands, not to his dominance.

"Also, it would be unwise for all three, Sesshomaru, Thor and I to be off Midgard in case The Mad Titan or The Other are somehow closer than my knowledge puts them." Loki admitted tactfully. Tony, still pinned against his own bedroom wall, then conceded. It would probably be a bad idea to have all three off Earth. They both still stared at each other, waiting for the other to break.

"Fine. Whatever, I'll babysit the scry-baby. I need a drink. You coming helicopter mom?" Tony bit out. Really, he could use that damn drink, but also being held against the wall in his own bedroom with an admittedly not unattractive Loki felt wrong. And not just because he used to be on SHIELD's most wanted either.

Loki backed up, probably realizing the same thing and his green magic that had started to fill the
whole bedroom started to fade.

"Yes, let's-" Loki was cut off by Tony shoving him sternly, earning a stumbling step backwards from the God. Loki, not one to be outdone, dropped and swept out his right leg and took out Tony's feet from under him with a reverberating crash. Tony then grabbed Loki's ankle and with a tug and a chop at this knee brought Loki crashing to the floor with a booming thud.

Tony realized this was stupid, but it felt good to take out some aggression on the God, the whole Star Wars character thing still grated him.

Tony and Loki wrestled like kids until Loki had pinned Tony to the floor, straddling him, both breathing heavy. Tony, under Loki, saw a tall figure dark in the doorway.

There they were, Loki was straddling Tony like a sloppy attempt at rough foreplay. Tony swallowed, looking up to see a blank faced Sesshomaru cracking his knuckles of one hand, his swords in their tubes in the other.

"Ahem. Not what it looks like, we uh, both fell." Tony coughed, the expression on Sesshomaru's face didn't change, if anything the temperature dropped.

'Is he pissed? If he is, is he pissed at me or Loki? Both? Does he get jealous? Why do I even feel awkward? Its not like Loki would ever be a thing. Hell, It's not like and Sailor Moon and I are a thing. How stupid would that be? I mean really. Bad idea even for me. Really bad. Capital B bad. Definitely glad I didn't act on it earlier today. Definitely.' Tony rubbed the back of his neck as Loki got off him in a singular fluid motion.

He still hadn't found any porn matching Sesshomaru's description yet though.

"..." Sesshomaru iced out an exhale through his nose. Loki sprung up from the floor too gracefully, a rug burn itched on Tony's elbow. Of all the dumb things to do, picking a hand to hand fight with a God only to make the overly-sensitive Demon mad all over again.

"Come Sho, let's meet the others to celebrate my most glorious homecoming! Twill be a most wondrous disaster!" Loki, beaming, stepped forward gesturing to the elevator and Sesshomaru's jaw clenched. Tony then wondered if Loki had planned the whole thing.

Crafty fucking God of Mischief… he was trying to make Sesshomaru jealous. Why Tony had no idea, it's not like he threatened their centuries long bromance.

Then his brain processed a crucial bit of information. Loki didn't call him Sesshomaru.

"Wait! You have a legitimate nickname?! Sho?!" Tony called out, catching up and swore he heard a low, hair prickling growl as Sesshomaru turned back to Tony, eyes bright in anger.

'This is just too good. Tony two, Sesshomaru one, Winning the game.' He rubbed his beard as he followed the pissed Demon into the elevator, fighting the urge to grab his ass from behind.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to all of y'all for your support. Gotta love a good fluff chapter after some heavy ones. Next will be Loki going back to Asgard!
Thanks for reading, let me know what you think, your comments make my day!!

-TL
Loki and the Gilded Throne

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loki and the Gilded Throne

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After the Avengers left the bar around 3:03am, in which he and Romanoff managed to edge out Thor and Clint in 8-ball, they all went to bed. Well except Stark who went to his workshop to tinker with what, not even the Nines knew.

Sesshomaru and Loki faced the glittering New York skyline on the roof in the cool April breeze. Loki leaning casually against the side of the tower while Sesshomaru stood sword-straight against the night.

Loki twisted his face, the mortal's alcohol faintly buzzing in his system. Loki was nobody's fool, yet, he allowed his fantasies about Clint distract him. Up until Stark retrieved Sesshomaru, and to his relief, allayed his concerns, he hadn't realized that something was seriously bothering the usually unflappable Demon.

He didn't even realize until he fled that Sesshomaru had basically avoided him! Him! The nerve! The audacity to let anything like a scry come between them to that degree. Sure, Loki adored teasing the demon and making him jealous, especially with Stark, but this was something completely different.

This wasn't some asinine game. Sesshomaru managed to do something no other seer was supposed to, scry his own death. And who knows what else! And whatever he saw he didn't trust him to ask about it. He knew the Demon was private but this was going a bit extreme. Sho should trust him with things like this.

He wanted to address it, but there other many unfinished conversations between them as well. Loki would ease him into it.

Loki explained the circumstances behind the mind control of Clint, that it was either kill or turn him; he was too valuable. The knowledge he had of SHIELD and the other members of the Avengers was too great, not to even mention his skills in the field.

He did tell Sesshomaru he managed to convince The Other that he only needed one of the Avengers, and he purposely tried to turn Stark, who he knew couldn't be turned, when Clint awoke. Loki knew it was due to the arc reactor that the scepter didn't work, it somehow countered the magic.

Also he was being somewhat monitored the whole time by the Other through the scepter. The scepter had a way of sensing people. The extent of that ability not even Loki knew even though the scepter spoke to him, in a way guided him. Almost a twisted, warped version of what he crafted Tenseiga's hilt to do. He was thankful he had crafted Tenseiga's hilt, because it trained him to place the protection spell on Clint with the scepter.

He didn't bother telling Sesshomaru about the scepter since it most assuredly no longer existed, it didn't require explanation. He also didn't wish to hear Sesshomaru drone and lecture on about the
danger using a weapon that did not belong to you. Inu no Taisho, the short-sighted daft Demon Lord had drilled into Sesshomaru that using any weapon, other than a sword of your own making, or of your own body, was a cowards' way out of fighting.

The coincidence that Bakusaiga managed to come directly from Sho’s body tickled him, his father certainly never accomplished such a feat.

Sesshomaru, in turn, reported for the fifty-three unaccounted years of his past. He spoke of how he came to find Jaken, ruler of a slaughtered water demon tribe, and he already knew of Rin. It didn't surprise Loki when he learned she had kept him company while he recovered from an injury his brother gave him fighting over Tessaiga.

It had confused him that Sesshomaru's father left his bastard child the sword that Sesshomaru trained tirelessly to wield so easily and so deftly. It equally shocked him that his father had his mother seal Sounga away in a location only she knew about, and she obviously she refused to tell Sho its location.

Sesshomaru's mother, the Demoness who watched on high as her son almost died protecting the falling Western Lands, was entrusted with the devastating sword of hell. What. In. The. Nines?! The folly that his father didn't trust Sho with any weapon other than Tenseiga was astounding.

Sesshomaru admitted to detesting Tenseiga, and wanting Tessaiga, the sword which could actually cut the living. Sho, corrected his opinion of the sword, especially after learning that Loki had helped craft it.

Loki's magic buzzed in pride.

Sesshomaru stated he abandoned his half-hearted quest of Tessaiga when he learned from the Magnolia Demon, Bokuseno, who he had met once, that his brother would literally go insane with bloodlust without its presence. He and his brother eventually reconciled somewhat, banning together to defeat Naraku, and a few other foes along the way.

Loki knew too well what it was like to covet what your brother had, material or otherwise. To have it consume you, turn you inside out into a raw, acidic mess.

Loki learned of this abomination Naraku, a half-Demon who used poisonous miasmas and puppetry to wreak havoc on his lands. He described their tireless fights, and the Shikon jewel which his half-brother and his friends, who Rin drew once, shattered and then collected. He reported initially he had no interest in fighting Naraku until two events occurred. One being that Naraku desired to absorb his power to defeat his half-brother.

Loki cackled in laughter.

The arrogance and sheer lunacy to hope to absorb or control Sesshomaru's power! Though apparently he had managed to elude Sesshomaru for a few years, it didn't seem like this half-demon was of a sound mind.

It was the second event that caused Sesshomaru to change his mind, which definitely caught Loki's attention.

This halfwit Naraku also created incarnations and used them like puppets. One of those puppets was a Wind Demoness named Kagura whose company he grew to enjoy.

Though Sesshomaru's facial features remained impassive, and his voice apathetic, Loki could tell by how his ears were flat against his head, and a slight twitch of his claws that this Kagura meant
something to his closed-off friend.

He stated calmly that all she ever wanted was her freedom, and he refused to help her. He admitted it was an error at the time he wished he could go back and correct. Sesshomaru recounted how she chuckled, how she fought.

And how she was killed by Naraku in a field of flowers Rin liked.

And how he still listened for her in the wind.

It made sense now to Loki, how Sesshomaru reacted to hearing that he had brainwashed Clint. To Sesshomaru what he did to Clint must be exactly the same as what Naraku had done to Kagura. Only he didn't kill Clint in a field of flowers. Impossible. Repulsive. Obscene. Never. He'd sooner throw himself onto the Other's sickles than ever harm Clint and Loki was sure that Sesshomaru knew that now.

Loki then glossed over the events of Thor's coronation, him slipping the Jotuns into Asgard for the Casket of Ancient Winters, Thor's foolhardy attack on the Jotuns' military and Thor's exile. He described his own ascent to the throne, and sending Destroyer after Thor. He summarized his scheme to lure Laufrey to Asgard. He then, of course had to illustrate all of this with his magic.

He told him conclusion where he killed Laufrey, and used his assassination attempt as motive to destroy Jotenheim's forces with the Bifrost. He even described his rather pitiful fight with Thor on the Bifrost when he wielded Gungnir, Odin's lack of approval and his slip into the abyss.

Loki had at first wondered if he should struggle more with the concept of trying to extinguish one of the more brutal tribes in Jotunheim. Obviously he was a Jotun, a Frost Giant, a strange quirk of fate to try to massacre your race, but Sho had done far more brutal things to other Demon tribes. All for their own father's approval. What was the Midgardian phrase? 'daddy issues?'

Sesshomaru furrowed his brow at the mention of Odin, and simply said that he must be blind in both eyes. Loki smirked it wasn't quite the case. Sesshomaru's voice remained icy when he said he would have no problem making it so.

Loki fired back that Sesshomaru was being dramatic. Sesshomaru just quirked an eyebrow, the obvious equivalent of 'you're one to talk'.

Sho then went on to elaborate that Odin was a blind fool for thinking Thor was so ready to have the throne. Sesshomaru also cracked his knuckles and said Odin should have trusted Loki's judgment that a preemptive strike on Jotenheim was best. Sesshomaru concluded that in war, you could not hesitate or show your belly. Loki gleamed in his approval, but still hesitated.

"As I recall, the Distant Realm king, Odin, had subjugated this race long ago. You simply finished his work as he raised you to learn to do and he rejected you for it. Yet he was lenient when Thor attempted the same but failed. Odin knows not what is best for the Distant Realm, nor for his two sons. He is indeed blind." Sesshomaru hissed out and Loki was speechless.

He had never thought of it like that.

Lastly, Sho told him of his mother, the Meido Stone, the underworld, Rin, and the Meido Zangetsuha, a technique which opened dimensional rifts to the underworld and send beings straight there. Loki opinion of his mother, however, had darkened and his magic vortexed inside him. What a distasteful woman using little Rin in such a way.

"Your mother, Sho, is devious and manipulative, and I know devious and manipulative. Though I
must say that your ability to create dimensional rifts into the underworld is fascinating. I have heard of no one else with that ability. A shame you had to give it to your half-brother.” Loki knew no sorcerers his caliber could simply send the living to the underworld without going through Death first. Sesshomaru would have shrugged if he did such things, but all he did was raise his eyebrows.

Loki leaned back and stretched in vindication when Sesshomaru finally gave a small smile and nodded, because it was something they both knew all too well. To achieve something and give the rewards and accolades to your brother.

Sesshomaru wasn't as bitter towards Inuyasha as Loki was to Thor, it was something he knew he had to work on.

'Thor doesn't truly deserve all my scorn, that is on Odin. Ever since my mind was reforged by the Other, I've had a staggeringly hard time properly assigning emotions towards some of my memories. It took years in Asgard prison setting straight what accurately happened in the past with Thor, and which emotions and memories were warped and manipulated.' Loki scrunched his nose.

Loki surmised that he and Sho, subconsciously or not, isolated themselves from their respective societies with regarding how they handled their emotions.

While Sho's rigid and meticulous control of his emotions honed his youki, it cost him friends by making him aloof and often misunderstood. Loki's own volatile emotions enhanced his magic, yet cost him friends as well when he would overreact to something or lash out against a slight.

Loki finally asked Sesshomaru about his scrying, and the only thing he revealed was that he did not merely see the events of the future, but he felt and lived them. That troubled Loki, he would have to ask Frigga about that. Normal seers never did anything but see the Astral Plane.

Loki knew Sesshomaru hid things from him, like details between his fight with his half-brother, his swords' powers, perhaps other abilities, and what exactly he scryed, but decided he wouldn't press. He had his secrets too. One, being of Jotunheim, and how he purposely let go of the Bifrost, and the torture he underwent. Hypocrisy is ugly.

He also confessed they were having this long drawn out heart to heart in case Odin did something rash. He didn't want them to part on bad terms like they did five hundred and fifty years ago.

Sesshomaru said if Odin did anything of the sort he would find a way to Asgard, and Odin would learn of his true savagery.

Loki reminded him that just because they can't hear or see Heimdall didn't necessarily mean that Heimdall couldn't hear or see them.

Sesshomaru just withdrew a slip of paper and wrote his methods into every vivid, excruciating, and eviscerating detail. He gave it to Loki, though he most certainly would not pass it on to Odin.

Loki laughed so hard sparks shot out his fingers, again. Sesshomaru flashed a fang.

They spoke till just before dawn, the rose red sky glinting off the skyscrapers like blood on a dagger. Loki could feel deep in his bones his voyage to Asgard would not go smoothly.

Dawn is when they gathered to go to Asgard. No amount of threats from Sesshomaru regarding his former father, nor reassurance from Thor could make his pulse slow.
He planned it so that he would purposely 'bump' into Clint as he left the bathroom. And by 'bump' he scanned out with his magic and teleported down to the door he was about to step through. He honestly didn't know what to expect from the encounter but if anything it would throw the assassin off balance and amuse him before he left to deal with rather unsavory business.

"You're an unnerving individual you know that?! Can't you just…oh I don't know walk down hallways like most people?" Clint huffed, hair wet, skin damp from the shower. Oh, Loki wished he could have joined him. Loki sensed the archer was a bit more amused by his antics than he let on.

At least that's what Loki told himself.

"But wouldn't it be so dreadfully dull if I was indeed like most people?" Loki's face lit in an anticipatory smile. Clint sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"If you were like normal people I'd be on vacation in Cadiz, Spain, maybe even with my niece and nephew. Instead I got dragged out to New Mexico, had Tony Stark thrown into me and got stuck here with this mess." Clint squinted his eyes closed and looked away as if in pain. But Loki wasn't quite buying it was genuine.

"If you wished it so, you would be there. It may even assuage Director Fury's concerns that I indeed lurk about Midgard as he so fears if you departed." Loki suggested a purposeful lead that didn't go the way he planned. Clint's eyes flared in anger.

"See, you're wrong, now I have the oh-so simple task of lying to Fury, but still reporting back enough information to him so that we can thwart yet another invasion. Maybe to you that's how things work. You can just shove off and do you, but I actually have a moral code I live by." Clint scathed back and Loki jerked his head back, eyes wide, lungs rattling.

Clint's selflessness had always rendered him feeling in the twisted pit where his heart should be, unworthy of him. Clint had heart, something Loki considered himself lacking.

It still stung like Sho's toxin to hear Clint confirm it.

He knew he didn't necessarily have much in way of a moral code, but to hear Clint throw it back to him caved his chest in.

'Perhaps, I once had a heart. After the Demons vanished my heart began to slowly harden. I started to grow callous and selfish. My ambition, my competitiveness, and the resentment that most Aesir viewed me as weak and unworthy made me cold yet volatile. A strange thing, really. Mortals believe that emotions come from the heart. When really, I think the more I lost heart, the stronger my emotions actually became.' Loki retreated from his prey, face fallen. He swayed his hips back to give him space, magic cramping in his gut.

Loki’s mouth opened but no sound came out. He didn't have a retort prepared. He didn't expect his playful encounter to turn on him this way. He smiled at Clint, but it didn't reach his eyes or his cheeks. He turned a full 180 degrees from Clint. It was foolhardy to seek him out before he saw Odin again. He deserved to be rebuked this harshly for seeking comfort in someone from whom he clearly didn't deserve any.

'Some silvertongue I have. It's not like an honorable mortal like him would reciprocate the feelings of such a twisted God like myself. Oh well. Now on to business. There must be a way to have Odin listen to me before commanding the whole Royal Guard to execute me. Or worse…Mayhap there is a way I can get to Gungnir…' Loki took a sure, strong step away from Clint, and another,
distancing and distracting himself. His magic tilted and spun off its axis.

"Loki wait. Stop." Clint called out, voice a hair high. Loki stopped as requested, drumming his fingers on his outer thigh. He waited, for what again he wasn't sure. He was never sure what Clint would do.

"I didn't mean…look, are you sure this is a good idea for you to go back to Asgard? Doesn't Odin think Fancy Pants boosted you out? If he thinks he can't hold you in a normal cell, what will be do?" Clint fumbled and Loki's eyebrows furrowed and his jaw went lax. Surely he was just worried about the mission. He turned back towards Clint, regaining composure.

"You needn't worry about the mission dear Clint. Thor has a good rapport with Heimdall, once we get to Asg—" Clint cut off Loki off.

"This isn't about the mission. You don't deserve to be punished anymore, You don—" Loki smiled sadly. Clint was such an idealist and simply didn't understand that the world wasn't fair and that he wasn't the judge nor jury for what he did and didn't deserve.

Loki put a finger out to silence Clint, wanting to press it to his lips, but hesitated and just hovered in front of his mouth, feeling the breath on it. Loki put together a convincing lie.

"Hush Clint. Don't fret about matters of which you have no control. If it will allay your fears, Odin will most likely simply try to banish me, or send the Warriors Three and Sif after me, which won't be effective, especially with your good friend Miss Romanoff with us." Loki chanced a dazzling smile, smoothing his jet black hair back. He didn't need to tell Clint that Odin, with the power of Gungnir and the Odinforce could silence his magic, and much, much more. It could easily vanquish him.

Not even Thor could stop him if that was what he desired to do.

'It was the true reason why I insisted on Sho staying on Midgard, even with Sesshomaru's immense youki, Odin would have the advantage if Sesshomaru challenged him. Which he would most definitely do if Odin so much decided to level one glare my way.' Loki thought the lie convinced Clint, but it hadn't quite done the trick.

"Don't humor me. I'm not a kid." Clint grabbed his outstretched hand and the touch scorched Loki's nerve endings. Even if his blue Jotun skin had been visible, his skin would have been warm from his touch. "What am I even...just don't throw a temper tantrum…and tone down your flashy, over-the-top theatric, arrogant, dramatic self so Fancy Pants and I don't have to actually go bail you out." Clint released his hand, and Loki's magic calmed that Clint managed to find his sense of humor once more. Yes. This was much better. Loki straightened his posture and his lips curved up and rounded his cheeks.

Clint simply mesmerized him. His broad, sculpted shoulders he wanted to grasp, his neck he wanted to murmur curses into, his calloused hands he wanted to shove down the front of his own pants. Loki was hooked. When he arrived on Midgard Clint's clear-sightedness, his loyalty, his honor instantly shone through the blue magicked haze his mind had become. Clint was prepared to attack an enemy had little knowledge of to defend Fury and the Tesseract.

"I won't throw a tantrum, I'll even be on my best behavior, if only just for you." Loki dipped his voice saucily in an easy lie, and almost, almost winked. His eyes locked onto the light brown eyes that belonged to the object of his torment. It sparked the brightest blip of happiness in him to be the one to fluster Clint so, to see his wind-worn, but still smooth cheeks flush red.
He chose then to teleport to where everyone was gathering in a puff of green smoke, of course before Clint could formulate any sort of response.

Rin attached herself around his waist in a death-grip of a hug. In one hand was the deer femur turned-weapon. He ruffled her hair which was currently up in a sloppy side-tail. With his magic he neatened her hair for her, straightening the hairstyle out.

He spotted Clint when he made his way up and for a heart clenching moment their eyes caught. Loki gave Clint a hollow and fake reassuring nod and grin. If…no…when. When, he returned he would most certainly reap the rewards of his billiards victory. Clint just scoffed good naturedly and crossed his arms and Loki felt his grin grow more genuine.

"Uncle Loki, I've been practicing!" Rin smiled, twirling the deer femur and Loki took a deep breath. If Rin couldn't melt their hearts, who could?

"I'm surprised you aren't giving Loki and Thor some thinly veiled threat that if anything happens to Rin you'll like rip off their heads and eat their hearts or something." Stark admitted to Sesshomaru and he turned back to the inventor, who had dark circles under his eyes.

"...I would make their father eat their hearts. It is a threat I have enforced before." Sesshomaru corrected with no hint of emotion. Stark and Banner paled. Romanoff nodded in approval to Clint's disappointment. Loki chuckled, despite the threat.

"It was that smarmy cousin of yours, Akira right? The one with the ridiculous hair?" Loki asked, provoking Sesshomaru to elaborate. Loki vaguely remembered one of Sesshomaru's haughty cousins who had outrageous teal hair he always kept in the most ostentatious of hairstyles.

"Yes, he attempted to take this Sesshomaru's life. When his father, my uncle, sought revenge I skinned him, made a cloak from his pelt and sent it to his mate as a gift. She didn't appreciate it. She came to assassinate me and I then made a cloak of her and hung them both in the banquet hall." Sesshomaru added and this time Clint took a step back. Loki knew exactly the two pelts he was speaking of, he once sat beneath one of them at his banquet hall long ago.

"...If you ever gift me any 'leather' clothing, I'd rather not know who it came from," Romanoff quipped, smirking. Clint whistled. Stark just stood speechless, for once. Banner chuckled darkly besides Stark, elbowing him.

'Yes mortals, and you thought I was cruel….' Loki rocked back on his heels smiling with all his teeth.

"Aye. A ruthless tactic indeed Son of Taisho! Twas very effective!" Thor beamed with pride that was usually saved for a little brother. Loki scoffed, he didn't think Thor would approve of such methods.

Loki knew Thor had never really thought of Sesshomaru as family as Loki had. Their relationship erred on the side of strained, mostly due to their fathers' constant comparing of the two. Thor's sunny personality always clashed with Sesshomaru's subdued one as well.

"Alright, let's head out. I want to be back before Fury knows I'm not planet-side. We have a forty-eight-hour window before I have to report back in." Romanoff reminded, shifting her small pack.

They had decided Romanoff should go because Fury would need someone he could trust to see the information first hand, and apparently Fury never trusted Clint the same after the mind control. Loki had winced when he heard that.
Romanoff also stated she being a woman will have an additional psychological advantage over Odin. Loki wasn't so sure, but he knew he needed all the help he could get.

"Yes, agreed. Now all stand here, this will tingle." Loki directed them all to stand right behind him at his eight, six and four o'clock and began to glide his arms through the air in a grand circular flourish, green and black smoke permeating the area in streamers of vapor. He caught Clint's light brown eyes one last time before closing his own.

'Here goes something.' Loki thought grimly to himself as he brought the magic into a wide ring around them.

"See you soon Lord Sesshomaru! Jaken!" Rin waved right before the smoke sucked back into them and with a clap they were gone.

Loki hadn't transported this many people with this spell in centuries, so he made sure he visualized everything with intense detail as they slipped into the starry expanse of Yggdrasil. And as quickly as they entered they exited.

Loki stumbled, light headed in exhaustion, exerting that much magic certainly took its toll. But it was worth it.

He teleported them right on the Bifrost. Terrific. The Bifrost, instead of gleaming in radiant color, looked sun-faded and dim.

"Whoaaaaaaaa It's so pretty! This is your home Uncle Loki?! Can Lord Sesshomaru, Jaken, Ah-Un and I live here too?" Rin hopped around a bit and Romanoff tried her best not to look too impressed.

"Asgard is a place for the Aesir, and my home no longer. You can visit. Sho has, though I cannot say he particularly enjoys it here." Loki murmured, guard on high alert. Thor strode out first, cape like a flag in the breeze. He looked every bit a Prince of Asgard in that singular moment.

A prince of a land he once wanted to rule, but no longer belonged in.

"Let's go friends!" Thor smiled and whether or not Rin sensed his unease, reached up and held his hand as they walked towards the resplendence that was Asgard. Loki squeezed her hand reassuringly.

"Loki, they must have spotted us by now, is the lack of a welcome wagon normal?" Romanoff asked cautiously. Loki knew she was armed but he didn't want to know with what or where it was located.

"Unsure. the last time I came here, I wasn't welcome." Loki wryly answered. Just then Sif and the Warriors Three appeared in the distance and ran to their location on the Bifrost. Loki stiffened, he would rather not have yet another fight on the blasted Bifrost.

"Hello Hogun, Fandral, Volstagg, Sif! So great to see you all again. I brought news, Loki and friends from Midgard!" Thor waved. Romanoff next to him steadied herself on high alert and slipped quickly in front of Loki, behind Thor.

Curiously, Rin also did the same, she had an unfamiliar serious look on her face. It took Loki a second to realize she was mimicking Romanoff. Loki reeled back, reminding himself that Rin was no ordinary mortal girl, and that she most likely needed a strong female authority figure to emulate.

The warriors ran up to Thor, their faces were friendly, but their hand were on their weapons.
"We have orders to apprehend Loki, God of Lies! You must step aside mortal." Hogun announced, gesturing to Romanoff. She didn't move an inch and had a 'make me' look stamped on her face.

"Thor, thank you for retrieving him!" Fandral wasted no time. Romanoff peeled off and stepped in front of them.

"Hello, we have not been properly introduced. I am Agent Romanoff, SHIELD shadow operative and fellow Avenger with Golden Boy over there. We didn't bring Loki back to put him in his cell. Loki brought us here to discuss a time sensitive matter with Odin." Romanoff introduced herself with a cool professionalism.

"I'm sorry Miss Romanoff you must be unaware that Loki is a fugitive! A malicious Demon conjured him from his cell!" Volstagg pointed a large finger at Loki who just rolled his deep green eyes.

'No Volstagg, Romanoff, one of the most intelligent mortals in all of Midgard, who fought with Thor against me on Midgard, didn't know I was a fugitive.' Clint's sarcasm had rubbed off on Loki.

By the nines Thor's friends use some critical thinking training.

"He is cunning and silver-tongued. You can't believe his words." Fandral said and Sif grabbed her twin blade and Rin immediately ran forward beside Romanoff, bone high. Sif tilted her square face down to the girl in utter astonishment at the apparent challenge.

'By the nines, Sesshomaru how do you handle her?' Loki thought in terror.

"Uncle Loki is a good person! And my Lord is no thief. He didn't kidnap Uncle Loki, he escaped himself! You don't scare Rin! You are all a bunch of bullies and I won't let you hurt him." Rin slammed her bone down on Fandral's foot and immediately barrel rolled way preparing another stance. Loki's jaw relaxed in surprise, Thor's friends could take notes from Rin's skills in perception.

Fandral winced and shook out his foot. Thor bellowed in good hearted laughter which positively annoyed the four warriors.

"Who is this barbarian girl?!" Sif reared back as if Rin was some sort of creature.

"Her name is Rin, and if you think of touching one hair on her head, I'll break you down so you can fit in my carry-on luggage." Romanoff bit coolly, and Rin gave her a thumbs up. Loki smirked as Sif took a half step back, as if judging how a mere mortal could achieve such a feat.

Loki had no doubt Romanoff could find a way.

"When I grow up I want to be as strong as you!" Rin smiled cheekily and Romanoff leaned back with her mouth in a small 'o'. Clearly Romanoff hadn't anticipated having such an effect on Rin. She better monitor her actions well.

"Fine job Lady Rin! Friends, listen to Lady Romanoff and Lady Rin, they speak no falsehoods. My brother has come to inform Asgard of a great threat. Come with haste, we must seek audience with Allfather." Thor's voice carried authority and suddenly Hogun turned on him, readying his mace. Thor's eyes widened in shock his trusted friend would draw his weapon on him. Loki could easily tell Thor was torn and hurt and it secretly irked Loki.

"...Thor you defend this felon and fugitive?" Hogun's voice high with disbelief. Volstagg backed up the smaller Vanir, shifting his weight like a wrestler would surveying a strong opponent.
"I represent my brother, and he is no felon! I intend to clear Loki's name with Allfather. Furthermore, I did not apprehend him. With the Bifrost drained of power only my brother has the prowess to navigate Yggdrasil to bring us here!" Thor explained, voice dark and looming. Loki could see his brother truly needed smarter friends. Yes, Hogun, please explain how Thor could teleport all of us here.

Yet, Loki thinned his lips. Thor speaking such impossibilities as clearing his name would only spur a more defensive reaction from his dimwitted friends. It wasn't worth attempting, the impending invasion is what truly mattered.

"And since Loki also brought us here, wouldn't it be logical to deduct that he also escaped prison on his own volition? Not that some Demon on Earth managed to spirit him away from prison here in Asgard? I understand you have orders, but they've been rendered obsolete." Romanoff crossed her arms and Rin next to her nodded, her little ponytail bobbing.

Pause.

"I will not let you cloud my mind! He murdered many mortals and lured in the Jotuns! I am not about to let you make another mistake regarding Loki!" Volstagg bellowed and charged, axe high towards the tightly clustered group and Loki went to intercept him. Whatever anger Volstagg had to take out on him he could easily suffer through. Thor hesitated for the slightest of moments.

Romanoff did not.

From her back pocket she removed a small canister, held one hand over Rin's eyes and pressed down the button.

Volstagg flailed back in a strangled cry from the spray, dropping his axe and groaning.

SHEILD's military grade mace. Simple but effective.

"Ahhh! I'm blind! The mortal woman has blinded me! Thor what friends are these?!!" Volstagg yelled out, doubled over and Sif went on the offensive, twin blade singing through the air only to be blocked by Thor.

Thor didn't hesitate this time, but the fact he hesitated the first time spoke volumes to him. The mortal woman, whose best friend he mind-controlled, acted to defend him before his supposed brother.

"I will not permit you to hurt my brother any longer!" Thor lost his cool and threw Sif's arm back roughly. Rebuked, Sif's eyes burned and she turned to Fandral who had yet to assume an offensive stance with his rapier.

Romanoff removed her hand from Rin's eyes and reached to a compartment in her bag almost completely unnoticed, eyes steady on Fandral in front of her and Hogun to her left.

"...alright Thor let's be off." Fandral conceded, usually the smartest one of the four if that meant anything. Loki thanked the Nines Thor finally got through to one of them.

"You cannot be serious Fandral! We have orders to apprehend him and when the Bifrost mends to collect that Demon!" Sif nearly pulled hair out of her head. Loki blinked, his father ordered the Warriors Three and Sif to apprehend Sesshomaru?

Did they seriously wish for their deaths so ardently? Surely Odin must recall how strong Sesshomaru is, the four of them would be no match for Sho, even on their best day.
"The sky is blue, the sea is too, don't mess with my Lord, or he'll beat you!" Rin sing-songed and raised her bone again, only this time Loki stopped her from attacking. They really did have to be on their way, and he liked his head where it was, and not on Odin's plate.

"Little one, your Demon Lord would not fare well against the us Warriors Three and Lady Sif!" Fandral bragged, his hand on Volstagg's shoulder who was slowly recovering. Loki coughed and sputtered and Romanoff bit her lip, sizing up each of the three with extreme skepticism.

"No good friend, he would surely slay you all." Thor stated serious as a thunder clap. All three turned to Thor eyes wide. Thor had never expressed doubt at their fighting abilities before. "He is the same Demon from the tournaments long ago! You must remember Son of Taisho, Lord Sesshomaru." Thor explained and Loki stifled a laugh from the pale look on Sif's face. Volstagg's jaw dropped and Fandral swallowed. Hogun clenched his fists.

"The silver haired, elven looking one with the moon upon his brow and the green toxic claws? The same sadistic Demon who decapitated a Vanir in a friendly Melee Tournament?! Of course, it would make sense Loki would somehow bring 'him' back." Hogun grit his teeth. Loki's eyes widened, he had not known that. Hogun, being a Vanir, would hold that against Sho.

"You leave out the part of the tale that the Vanir smuggled throwing daggers into the ring, a clear violation of rules. Let's not dally, come now brother and friends of Asgard and Midgard!" Thor defended and gleefully motioned forward and Volstagg, Hogun and Sif reluctantly, and warily, followed. Loki felt a bit of warmth light his chest that Thor approved of Sesshomaru's sense of honor.

"So Glow Stick what's your play? I doubt it's the Hulk this time." Romanoff whispered, Rin led them pumping her bone in the air as if leading a parade.

"I have erred on the side of improvisation and creativity." Loki replied calmly, no sense lying to Romanoff.

"You don't have any idea do you?" Romanoff's expression dropped.

"Right now, I'm trying to ensure Odin doesn't eat Thor's and my hearts." Loki pointed to Rin "Worry not dear Spider, they don't call me silver-tongue for nothing." Loki reassured, but he could tell she was left wanting.

They walked the rest of the way in a strained, eerie silence. Asgard appeared deserted, not even a bird sang. Perhaps everyone waited in hiding to witness his complete demise. It didn't matter really.

Loki's palms started to sweat and he fidgeted with his armor. He struggled with smothered pangs of ancient nostalgia, cold dread, and gut-churning unease. Loki knew, deep down, this could not be his home ever again. Well, if it ever truly was his home in the first place. Too much had transpired, too many secrets, mistakes, and lies. Some he responsible for, some Thor, some Odin.

Not to mention the humiliating, body breaking, mind numbing torture, but who was really counting?

'Am I truly just some war trophy? Was I even abandoned? Did Odin ever consider me family? Was I only just a pawn in a game to ensure Thor reached the gilded throne with a younger brother to advise him? Did Odin even have desires for my own destiny?' Loki's questions strung themselves in a tangle.
Is it ironic that the God of Lies is a Lie himself?

He should have noticed sooner that he never quite belonged in Asgard, that he wasn't a true Aesir. That he was the monster that all Aesir feared, something always rejected. Something that of course, didn't belong to their society, much less their idea of something to be looked up to as a Prince.

Not only was he a Jotun, a Frost Giant parading about in an Aesir glamour, but his very mind also now existed as an incomplete and flawed mess. There was something very wrong with him, with all that he was. He wasn't just a mistake, he was a mistake that someone shattered and put back together all wrong.

'Doomed from the start, then tossed aside only to be broken down. The abomination I am now, a broken blade like me shouldn't exist.' Loki gulped, eyes pricking with a hint of water and magic. He just had to hold it together for the next few months, to keep himself, the biggest lie of all, a secret.

They reached the marbled throne room sooner than he anticipated. Nothing to note occurred on the walk, it was as if the entirety of Asgard had avoided him. As he expected, nothing prepared him for seeing Odin again, on high with Gungnir shining and imposing. Loki fought the rattling of his lungs.

The guards, dressed in Asgard's finest armor held him down, not unlike they did when Sesshomaru's Demon Blood took over and slew the other five Aesir. Though Sesshomaru didn't live to save him this time.

The kick to the ribs was expected, even anticipated over what was to come. This blunt pain was nothing new. A butt of a spear to the temple blackened the vision in his left eye and his mouth flooded with a familiar metallic tang. He laughed and spat the blood across the marble floor and onto the guard's boots.

"Good morning, or is it evening? One can't be too sure." Loki flashed a red toothed grin and received another kick to the stomach causing another round of cackling from the God of Lies.

"You know what it will take this time, to prevent us from reporting back to Odin that you've been disagreeable. You don't want that do you?" The guard sneered and Loki found his voice again, still chuckling.

No. he most certainly didn't want that, but of course not for the reasons anyone in Asgard thought.

"No, let's be on with it." He got to his knees and licked his lips automatically, tasting more iron. He knew exactly what the guards wanted, again.

He pursed his lips, a cacophony of emotions sounded in him, rage, shame, dread, fear, anxiety, spite, despair, hope, desperation. Loki suddenly shrank and his hands quivered. He could never stand tall enough in front Odin. His one eye watched him like a frog would a fly.

The only thing stopping him from freezing all together was a teary-eyed, exhausted Frigga descend with haste down the grand flight of stairs.
"Father, Mother! It is good to see you both and good to be home! Brother has brought me here, as well as our friends from Midgard." Loki didn't dare even breathe incorrectly. His green eyes darted from Odin to his mother who unabashedly maneuvered her way through the Warriors Three to him.

"My son!" And Loki froze stiff when she threw her arms around him. He barely had the sense to put his arms robotically around her. Lightly returning the embrace, he stood shell shocked. He didn't foresee this particular reaction from her. His stomach flipped. The last he saw of her almost two years ago, she dimly shook her head, heavy with disappointment. Even after Odin took his familial lineage from him. His name. His identity. She called him son.

She actually called him son. She addressed him before Thor!

Frigga leaned back, pouring over Loki only the way a mother could, even running her thin fingers through his dark hair.

"...Mother." he dared say in front of Odin. "It's true, I have returned, with friends." He breathed, proud his voice sounded more sure than did, much like when he pretended to be Sesshomaru. 'Hold yourself together Loki, there is much at stake here.'

"I can see. Hello I'm Queen Frigga, you must be Rin correct?!" Frigga leaned over some to Rin who was standing beside her with her bone ready. Rin relaxed, however, when she saw her warm smile.

"Yes! My name Rin! May I draw you for my Lord Sesshomaru?" Rin asked getting her bag. Loki cut a gaze to his mother, how did she know of Rin? From the Bifrost? Had she heard them?

"Yes of course sweetie. Ah, and you must be Natasha Romanoff. Pleased to meet you." Frigga extended a regal hand and Romanoff accepted it without hesitation.

"Likewise, it's a pleasure." Romanoff responded softly. Loki quirked his eyebrows in confusion at his mother. 'Romanoff never used her first name introducing herself to Fandral.' Loki's eyebrows furrowed, had Frigga truly watched him on Midgard and said nothing to Odin?

"I've been watching you, come." Frigga whispered in Loki's ear and she led him up, past the hotly suspicious and unimpressed Warriors Three and Sif, to Thor who poised himself with palpable assurance that Loki undertook to mirror.

Odin gripped Gungnir and ever so slowly waved the grand spear to point its splendid point at Loki.

"Loki, you have much to explain. I have vowed to my dear Frigga that I would hear you out." Loki didn't even wince when Odin didn't call him son. Odin looked unimpressed and a more than a hair contemptuous.

"Odin, I have endeavored and solicited your ear on this matter for many a Midgard's moon. I now stand before you, not as your son, your fugitive, nor as your God of Mischief but as an emissary." Loki found his pace. He could do this. He straightened, he had a job to do. He had people to protect, in particular a most alluring archer.

"The Mad Titan Thanos' armada is encroaching Midgard for its complete desolation. Of this I am most keenly certain. It is for this, and only this, I implored you to summon the Demon Lord Sesshomaru to this time, not for any blade of lore." Loki continued and Odin shifted, the barest hint of skepticism and perhaps amusement danced in his eye. Loki saw this.

"I would not have risked his life for a reunion; no matter how assiduously I searched for him. I required him so he could prove to Thor and the Avengers of Midgard that I speak with deepest
"veracity when I say that the Mad Titan, Thanos, seeks to extinguish them and Asgard for the Tesseract and the Infinity Gauntlet."

Loki finished, he was glad he wore his armor to his homecoming for it made him feel impervious to Odin's stony stare.

The Warriors Three and Sif, even Volstagg with his bloodshot, itchy eyes stilled like statues. The name The Mad Titan Thanos made even the mightiest of Aesir's chest clench.

"What proof do you have?" Odin finally spoke, voice deep and demanding.

"The weapon Stark used against them took out their primary fleet, but their secondary fleet stationed nearby remained unharmed. Their contingency plan, if my invasion were to fail, was to make with haste to Midgard. I learnt of their fleet size, maximum possible velocity and position during my time in the second in command's Battleship. While they may have the means of being undetected by even by Heimdall, with my magic embedded in the hull of their battleships, I can give Heimdall a small window of visibility." Loki nearly cracked when having to relive his time with The Other again. The wires, the blue. The glass. The broken blade.

Loki swallowed, his mind bled and struggled to staunch it. He had to stand clear and strong.

"Your magic is in the battleships? Loki tha—" Loki cut Romanoff with a wild, frenzied look. He couldn't handle telling her, or anyone about the Other's experiments just yet.

"Aye, Allfather, every action Loki has undertaken has been to relay this information to us and Midguard. We need only to seek Heimdall-" Thor began, voice sure and stance strong.

"Enough, Thor. I need time to think of this. Loki has much gall to request anything of Heimdall, as do you." Odin waved Thor off and was about to sternly reproach Loki when a small blur scampered between Thor and Loki. A ponytail wobbled back and forth.

Loki paled ivory white.

"Hello! I'm Rin, I drew you a picture! It's of my Lord Sesshomaru, Uncle Loki, Storm God, Jaken and I. We are all eating ice cream, well except Lord Sesshomaru of course. Uncle Loki's favorite is lime sherbet, Storm God's favorite is cookie dough, Jaken and I haven't decided yet. Clint, the archer, also likes green ice cream just like Uncle Loki but I didn't draw him. He is back on Earth waiting for us with my Lord. Do you have a favorite ice cream flavor?" Rin dug through her bag and showed Odin her picture. Odin's eye bugged out wide.

Loki had no idea what was about transpire, however he knew if Odin tried to harm her in any way imaginable his wrath would know no equal.

"Why is she here? What nonsense is this? Who are you, girl?" Odin looked past Rin to glare harshly at Loki. Romanoff was prepared, Loki spotted the collapsible, charged baton in the waistband of her motorcycle leggings.

"She meant no offense, she is just a child. Her name is Rin, she is my protégé and under my, and by proxy SHIELD's and the Avengers' protection. She wished to join me on this trip to travel, sketch, and train. She is Lord Sesshomaru's adopted daughter as well. She merely wishes to show her appreciation for your hospitality. We had thought you'd be receptive of an illustrated account of your sons' time on Earth." Romanoff squared up to Odin, her voice soft like satin, but Odin was not convinced. His grip tightened on Gungnir.

Oh no.

"The daughter of Lord Sesshomaru, that aloof, disrespectful Dog Demon?! The Son of the late Inu
no Taisho, wielder of Sounga the most sinister sword in existence?! The very Demon you persuaded me into summoning here, who with his youki released you from your just sentence?! You tell me he adopted a mortal girl and you, Thor and Loki brought her here?" Odin's eyebrow rose and he banged Gungnir on the sparkling floor of the throne room in a shockwave. Rin put her hands over her ears from the deafening clanging noise.

'I hadn't remembered Odin having such an ill opinion of Sho and his father. It must be due to the Other reshaping my mind I suppose. How unfortunate Odin still believes Sho released me, not that I left on my own volition.' Loki's throat itched with green magic.

"Allfather, Son of Taisho did not free Loki from his imprisonment, Loki left under his own power. Son of Taisho merely wished for her to sketch Asgard." Thor defended and Odin's jaw clenched.

"You expect me, Odin, King of Asgard, to believe that the merciless Demon Lord, the one who decapitated a Vanir opponent in a melee tournament with his talons, merely wants her here to draw a picture?" Odin's voice raised with Gungnir. Frigga moved towards him. Loki's eyes squinted in confusion, what was Odin implying?

"My Lord Sesshomaru isn't merciless! He saves people! He saved Jaken and I! He is a kinder person than you!" Rin balled her small wrists and reached back for her bone. Loki's pupils constricted in horror.

'No!' Loki shot a look to Romanoff who grabbed Rin's shoulders.

"Allfather, he only decapitated that Vanir because he smuggled weapons into the tournament, a clear viola—" Odin cut Thor off with a laser of a gaze and Gungnir began to glow an assortment of rainbowed ribbons of color. All marbled hues of visible light spectrum. Loki's senses jolted and sizzled from the Odinforce magic.

Loki readied himself on the balls of his feet and his arms out to the sides, fingers coiled in green magic.

He wouldn't last long against Odin, but he would last long enough.

"He is probably using her to scout Asgard, along with this mortal woman, her spy of a mentor. Loki is this all truly revenge against me?! You had me summon this Demon here and you two plan on taking over Asgard?" Odin snapped, Odinforce magic crashing like radiant meteors all around them. Beautiful yet deadly, they left craters in the throne room floor and the Warriors Three, Sif and other guards all took cover from the outburst of magic.

Romanoff dove to the side and wrapped Rin up in her arms to shield Rin from a fatal meteor blow. Loki's instincts took over and he instantly flung out an emerald force field around the two mortals. He successfully deflected the blow and defied his former father in one singular act.

How dare he!

'How dare he thinks so low of Sesshomaru, of Romanoff, of Thor, an innocent mortal girl?! Was Odin always this paranoid? Has senility finally claimed his mind? No, I know what this is.' Loki seethed, biting his lower lip in percolating rage.

'It is irrationality to the highest degree, Odin's mind can only see me as a danger to Asgard. Nothing else.' Loki's magic churned in him and seeped out his eyes, smoking upwards. He strode out front, all pine-scented magic, brushed bronze, and dark green leather.

"Is your disgust, your distrust of me, so great it leeches into these innocents?" Loki's green magic
spiked, flashing like fireworks against the kaleidoscopic, dazzling Gungnir's meteors.

"Agent Romanoff fought valiantly against me years ago. Of this you know. She would never align herself alongside me unless I spoke the truth of this invasion, and certainly not to gain knowledge to attack Asgard! You also think Thor so dense to not see through such a transparent plot?! Thor is no one's fool!" Loki's green protection magic amplified, lacing the room like vines from his fingers. Loki didn't notice anyone, or anything except Odin, whose reaction was only to move Gungnir slightly.

"Sesshomaru has never enjoyed Asgard and certainly has no desire to rule it. It disappoints me that you think I value Sesshomaru's life so low to risk it for your paltry throne! I desire it no longer!" Loki's body buzzed as if it was filled with hornets and his pulse beat deep and steady like a drum.

"I desire Asgard's halls, fields, rivers or mountains as my home no longer!" Loki's verdant magic vines exploded outwards with barbed thorns, fingered leaves, and tight buds.

"Though I have suffered and strived to protect Asgard, it has ceased to be my homeland when I fell from the Bifrost. I have made my lamentable mistakes, but so have you! and I have paid dearly for mine!" Loki advanced towards Odin, tall, commanding, regal and strong. He embodied everything the Aesir thought they could only see in Thor.

"You made a costly one when you took a certain spoil of war back to Asgard from Jotunheim, with the sole intent to use me as a pawn to unite the two realms! Your second mistake was giving me the carrot that I could equal to Thor, when all I could or would be given was the stick. Your third was when you conspired to mold me into something I could never truly be!" Loki's voice crescendoed high, sounded strained with malice.

His vines now thickened, expanded and ensconced all around everyone in the throne room like a jungle out of Midgard's amazon. The thorns, leaves, and buds now glowed and turned towards Odin and Gungnir as if sentient.

Odin, half curious, pointed the mighty Gungnir at one of the buds and let loose a volley of magic, only for the rainbow hued meteors to be absorbed like a sponge.

"Sesshomaru was right, Asgard is but a trite façade. Your gilded throne has revealed itself as a sallow jester's stool when you turned your back on what you turned me into! When you told me what I truly was and then rejected me for all that I am!" Loki's eyes sparked and he forgot he wasn't supposed to stand a chance against Odin.

Brimming with emerald orbs and mist, the flowers' pollen surrounded and overpowered the Odinforce magic, condescending it back into Gungnir like a glowing, emerald snare. The thorns shot out like javelins, creating a spiked barricade around him and Odin, containing the rest of the Odinforce magic.

The magic thrummed through Loki's veins like strummed lute strings and as soon once the last vestiges of the Odinforce magic retreated back into the Gungnir the flowers wilted and the barricade vanished. As if the magic knew it was a success itself, and not just its wielder, the vines shrunk, retracting back would back into Loki's fingers and eyes. Loki’s breath came out deep and sure.

'That was…different. Astonishing. How was I able to defeat the Odinforce?! It controls all magic! My magic flows from it! I..’ Loki then noticed everyone staring at him. Rin smiling giving him a
thumbs up, Romanoff calculating, face trained to hide her disbelief. Thor turned to him, jaw slack. Frigga had her hands clasped together in front of her mouth, hiding a prideful smile.

Odin shook, eye wide with it trained on Gungnir as if it betrayed him personally. The air in the room still smelled acutely of pine.

"Most importantly." Loki confidently continued. "Rin is my niece and merely eight Midgardian years old. She only wanted to show you her artwork, and you have disgraced yourself in rejecting her gift." Loki took a deep breath and rolled his neck and shoulders, regaining a more composed posture, running an adrenaline fueled hand through his long hair.

Pause.

"Natasha, if Odin didn't like ice cream he could have just said so." Rin muttered. Romanoff cracked a smile, stepping from in front of her, to beside her. She studied the contemplative, if not surprised Odin. Loki walked briskly to Rin and picked her up with ease.

"Guards, escort Loki and the mortals to his chambers!" Odin bellowed his order, delayed. Frigga watched, as her son, his niece, and his friend, with heads high, stride away into the castle, towards Loki's old room, which remained as it was before everything crashed down around them. Frigga let loose a long deep breath she didn't realize she had been holding and tears streamed down her face in relief.

"This is the man I know; this is my son." Loki barely caught Frigga's murmur and he smiled widely.

"Ok, for once Glow Stick, your flare for dramatics got us out of trouble, rather than into trouble. Nice job." Romanoff admitted, patting Loki on his back like they had known each other for years. Well, they had, but not in a familiar way.

"Oh, the battle has just begun Romanoff. My little display in there has most likely incensed Odin to turn a blind eye, no pun intended, to our cause. Like your Midgardian film, Star Wars, I am Princess Leia, and our dear Thor is Obi wan Kenobi, he is our only hope." Loki managed a wry smile, with his fists clenched.

"Well, you better hope he is Obi Wan and not Luke, Luke and Leia did have a kissing scene in that movie." Romanoff jabbed and Loki closed his eyes, face palming.

"Thor and I have never entertained such—" Loki, appalled and exasperated, was cut off by Romanoff.

"Well, when you were Sesshomaru, it sure sounded like Thor may have at one time entertained such ideas with your best friend. I wonder if Pretty Boy—" Loki put a finger up, cheeks blazing red.

"That, you promised me, you would never bring up again! I refuse to visualize Sho and Thor in that fashion!" Loki felt his green magic eddy again in his fingers, including the one he held up to Romanoff. The two unaware that Rin had intently listened to their conversation.

"You guys are silly. Lord Sesshomaru likes chocolate way more than cookie dough." Rin sing-songed and the two adults looked down at her, shocked by her sagacity.

Because they both knew it was true. Thor was cookie dough ice cream….chocolate was Tony Stark.
"Well, Princess Leia, you don't fall for Luke, spoiler alert. Though I think I know who you do fall for." Romanoff motioned a bow shooting an arrow and Rin giggled. Loki would have paused in his stride if the guards behind him would have allowed it.

Romanoff wasn't implying that. There was no way, she simply referenced that silly cupid myth.

That had to be it.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for reading! Loki is back in Asgard but things are never easy :( let me know how you liked it!

-TL
Clint and the Doldrums

Chapter Notes

Warning: mentions of suicide are in this chapter, if you feel uncomfortable reading it, skip the second italicized part. Also, again, this is an AU, i will be taking some creative liberties with Clint's backstory again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clint and the Doldrums

(*)

Clint thought the next two days were going to be dull and he was OK with that. He could use some dull, uneventful days in his life. He could kick back, watch some ice hockey games, get some quality alone time…it would be great.

But, instead, he just stewed.

No Thor using his football coach voice inside and threatening crabs. No Nat, the person he was actually closest with, to make sarcastic and snarky comments to. No Rin running absolutely everywhere, driving Jaken crazy, and giving everyone smiles and ice cream. No sphinx-like, tricky, obscure, and downright bizarre God of Mischief plaguing his existence with verbal games and thirsty side glances.

Clint, thinking of Loki, was thrown back to their conversation at the bar two nights ago, before they all left for Asgard.

Tony, ostentatiously, bought out the bar out for the night. Clint at first only thought he did so Fancy Pants wouldn't absolutely die of acute social anxiety, or maim a drunken idiot. But Clint then had a feeling he also did it so Loki could stay looking like Loki, not having to hide.

And maybe also to just show off his billionaire status. It did get under Steve's skin.

One of the first things he did when he got to the bar, since Fancy Pants was avoiding and ignoring both Tony and Loki, was ask him to play darts. The 'I don't play games because I'm big, bad, better than you Demon Lord' actually eyed the dartboard. Clint knew he had him hooked.

But, then of course Tony got his attention by literally coming in between them, handing Sesshomaru a Singapore Sling he had mixed 'special' for him.

To Clint's mild surprise Sesshomaru studied the cherry flavored cocktail and after about ten seconds even chanced a sip. Clint sniggered to himself that the Demon was still as paranoid as ever. Paranoid over what he wasn't quite sure.

Clint was like, ninety percent sure Tony wasn't trying to take advantage of a drunk Demon Lord and pry out any information out of him. Could Demons even get drunk? He had a hard time
picturing Fancy Pants anyway but perfectly composed.

Clint had a fishy feeling that something had happened between Tony, Loki, and Fancy Pants because Tony was trying extra hard to get him in one-on-one conversations. Loki was just eyeing them from afar, probably scheming something in the same leagues of Voldemort. Clint was relieved for once it didn't involve him.

Clint decided to let Tony do his thing, except not. He picked up a dart and threw it between Fancy Pants and Tony hitting the center of the bullseye.

Challenge presented.

Fancy Pants picked up a dart quicker than a snake strike and threw it, hitting the same place on the bullseye, just angled differently. Sesshomaru's eyes never left Tony's, and Clint was pretty sure that was intentional.

Challenge accepted.

Oh yeah, this was going to be a good game. Clint picked up another dart and on cue immediately felt a pair of eyes burn through the nape of his neck like the arctic sun. Well, that had to be Loki.

'What a brat. Didn't he torment me enough at dinner? Does he really want a round two? Well, I suppose he is going back to Asgard, the place where his family sat back and let him get tortured for a few years. He can't be but so excited about that. In fact, he is probably a simmering stress case. Maybe I shoul—' Clint's thoughts were cut off by Steve and Bruce approaching, curious.

"Hey you two show offs should let some people with non-freak show projectile skills have a shot." Tony coughed, and Clint finally put two and two together. If Fancy Pants really had his hair in a knot over Tony, then if they didn't make nice now the next two days were going to be utterly irritating. Damnit Tony Stark had ruin his fun.

"Yeah, knock yourselves out. Gotta save myself something to do for the next couple of days." Clint went up to the dartboard and removed the two expertly placed darts. Clint inspected their impeccable placement.

Yup, Fancy Pants and he would definitely have to face off at some point.

He placed the darts in Steve's hand who gave Tony a 'how did I get involved?!!' look. Psychically, Bruce took one from Steve, probably picking up on the tense attitude coming from Tony and Fancy Pants.

Clint grabbed his drink and had made his way over to Loki before he even realized he made the conscious decision to do so.

"So, how you feeling about going back home? You know there are some pretty good fugitive movies you could watch to give you some tactical advantages." Clint swirled his whiskey ginger with his stirrer. He didn't drink liquor a lot, but when he did he liked to keep it simple, and just a touch sweet. Loki, seated next to him at the bar, with a dry gin martini, turned to him, eyes unfocused.

Of course he and Fancy Pants drank the same liquor, gin.

"It matters not how I feel, Clint. It simply must be done, and I am the only one who can do it." Loki took a small sip of his martini and Clint rolled his eyes.
"Oh yeah, here I thought I could have a conversation with you that wasn't as dramatic as a soap opera. Level with me." Clint straightened up, mirroring a gulp of his highball. Loki turned to him, eyebrows raised.

"Well then." Loki turned and abruptly stood, and for a shocked moment Clint thought Loki would leave. "Allow me to level with you in a different manner. I suspect you must be at least someone decent at pool billiards." Loki took the toothpick from his martini and with perfect teeth plucked an olive from it. Clint rolled his eyes at the intimidation tactic. While he wasn't as good at pool as darts his older brother had taught him well.

"...you want to play me in 8 ball? Well, it's a smarter choice than darts I can tell you." Clint pointed his thumb to Steve and Bruce playing, grabbing his drink and standing.

Clint realizing, though he stood tall, Loki stood just an inch or two taller. He really should have noticed that when sparring, but he noticed it now when they stood facing each other not trying to knock each other's block off.

"Oh, I know my limits and to not challenge you to that particular contest of skill. Yes, let us have a contest of 8 ball. We may even play in teams if you wish, you may pick your partner." Loki looked positively stoked. Clint wondered when the last time Loki played a game was, well a game that wasn't a scheme, or some sort of fight. Loki conjured pool balls in the air, spinning like planets around the cue ball like in a solar system.

'Yeah sure, play the magical God in pool. Sounds like a fair fight.' Clint scanned the bar. Sesshomaru now stood at the end of the bar completely cornered by an unexpectedly sober Tony playing bartender, asking him all about god knows what.

Poor guy.

Fancy Pants and Tony were out, he doubted Sesshomaru's talons would be good for the pool table anyway. Bruce and Steve were already playing darts, poorly. He didn't have the heart to tell them they were doing it all wrong. That left Nat and Thor who were discussing the mission to Asgard tomorrow.

Clint then knew Loki meant to trap him into choosing one of the two.

But which one should he choose? Was this one of those damned if you do, damned if you don't puzzles? Clint took another sip of his drink. There was only one clear option.

"Hey Thor, wanna be my partner in 8 ball?! Loki said he wants to challenge you!" Clint could hear the steam of anger rise from Loki's ears, Clint turned to him, wagging his head to side to side smiling from ear to ear. Clint didn't know what he did to make him so mad, but it totally jazzed him.

"Hark! Brother! A friendly Midgardian sport will be most marvelous. I must confess I have never competed in this sport before Hawk's eye but I have been known to be a most swift learner!" Clint's expression fell. Of course Thor would have no clue what billiards is. Oh well, it was worth it to see Loki go bananas.

"I call Glow Stick. Team 'Spy-Voltage' is going down." Nat stood, not even waiting for Loki to say anything. Clint turned to Loki, who, now looked more intrigued and less fussy. Such a bizarre guy, err God.

"Oh Nat, don't tell me you're now doing Tony's bad puns. Besides if we are doing team names,
then we are team…” Clint tried to think of something with wings and badass, then remembered that back in the Quinjet they did compare Fancy Pants and Loki to Harry Potter characters. “… Team Griffindor. And we're going to top shelf the both of you. Right Thor?” Clint nudged Thor and he raised his mug of beer.

"It's ok, Team Slytherin will go easy on you, a quick and mostly painless defeat.” Nat responded, it was then Clint noticed exactly what he managed to do. He paired up the two slyest, sneakiest, and trickiest people he knew: Loki and Nat.

'You made this so much worse Clint. Forget Fancy Pants, those two working together could be world ending.' Clint strode to the cues, and picked two up that looked somewhat straight, handing one to Thor. He could feel green eyes on him as Loki placed the balls on the table, beginning to rack them.

"Oh, yes Romanoff, our victory is assured. How about a friendly wager?" Loki's toned shoulders rocked fluidly back and forth, setting the balls in the rack in proper position. The motion raked across Clint's brain like a scalp massage, as if Loki was beckoning him. Clint took another sip of drink watching Loki finally rock back and straighten. No way was he agreeing to a bet like that. It screamed trap.

"Aye! Brother another splendid idea! On Asgard, whoever wins earns the power to beseech a request of the other party!" Thor, inside voice long forgotten, announced taking a big gulp of his beer. Clint swallowed an ice cube whole. 'Thor of all the dumb ideas…' Clint was about to speak up when he heard Nat.

"Deal. We accept. We will even let you break." Nat responded immediately and Clint put down his drink on the rail lining the wall and spread his arms wide to Thor in a classic 'Really man?!' stance. Loki's cackling filled the bar.

"I'm glad my opinion was taken into consideration. You're still losing, I'm gonna turn Thor into a poolhall junkie." Clint pointed his cue waving it between Nat and Loki, both grinning knowingly. Thor bounced a bit, apparently just happy to be playing with his brother.

'Oh. It is that simple for Thor. He just wants to play with his brother. Well, I am going to at least help him make it competitive.' Clint went up to the head of the pool table, sizing up his break.

Clint quickly went over the rules of the game for Thor, who knows maybe even for Loki.

"Alright, just remember Thor, it's a game of finesse and accuracy, so feel free to tone down your bowflex biceps." Clint leaned over, noticing Loki standing at his twelve o'clock, observing him break like a tiger. No way would Clint let Loki get in his head. Clint lined up his break, jacked back, and speared forward. The cue ball hit the triangle of colored ones with a satisfying crash of clacks. Clint's brown eyes lit up when he saw the eleven, the nine, and the three ball all sink.

"Ok Glow stick, let's show them how it's done.” Nat moved to take her turn, quickly lining up a shot on the two, sinking it in the side pocket to tie it up. She missed her next shot on the seven, but barely. Nat had gotten a little rusty since he last played her. Did he play her last in Astana,
Kazakhstan maybe?

"I shall prove my mettle Hawks-eye!" An overzealous Thor circled the table, spotting an easy shot on the thirteen, revealed by Nat's missed shot. Clint watched as Thor carefully lined up the shot, pulling back on the cue and pushed forward.

The cue ball rocketed off the table and punched through the wall, just wide of Nat's head.

Pause.

"Mettle proven Thor. Maybe, next time use a putter." Clint took a sip of his drink as Loki patched the hole in the wall, and conjured a new cue ball. Nat side stepped around the table, eyes narrowed at Thor. The crunch of the cue ball through the dry wall attracted the attention of Bruce and Steve, who filtered over.

"And here I thought you didn't want a war with Midgard, Thor." Nat flipped her pool cue a few times and Thor shot up.

"'Twas but a warning shot!" Thor flashed a smile that would make Nat, if she were any other woman, or even a man, toss their panties.

Clint chuckled, as Nat had no choice but to basically forgive him.

Loki, despite cleaning up another one of his brother's messes, which usually really set him into a tail-spin, smirked.

Loki levitated the cue ball above his hand, debating on where to place it. He must really be getting a kick out of beating Thor at something.

"This is a good spot I think." Loki moved next to Clint, brushing past his back which Clint could have avoided him but decided against it. He didn't look into why he didn't move. Laziness. Pure laziness.

Clint caught a whiff of Loki's magic, and a wave of nostalgia hit him. Loki smelled just like Christmas. How had he never noticed before? Was he just too angry or distracted?

Loki bent over, dark hair almost touching the felt of the table as he lined up his shot. Clint noticed he chose one of the most difficult shots on the table despite having ball in hand. Clint studied Loki as he fluidly, like a jaguar, bent over, back flat and straight. His arm jacked back and the cue poked forward elegantly.

The six ball, of course it had to be green, smoothly rolled into the side pocket. Loki immediately straightened and smiled brightly. Clint stilled, did Loki just genuinely smile?

"Brother, a fine shot!" Thor beamed, finishing his beer. Loki gave him a 'yes I know' face. Clint splayed his hands in the air.

"Thor, you do realize that we're the ones on a team, right?" Clint weighed the possibility of Thor losing on purpose, but then realized Loki would know and be upset about it.

"Ah, the five next." Loki swayed from side to side languidly, contemplating his shot before leaning over, lips pursed in concentration. Clint frowned, unfortunately, his angle and his aim were right on.

Loki sunk the five. He was damned good, like he had been doing this for a while.
"So how do you know billiards and not Thor?" Clint finally questioned, Loki looked up from the table, expression like a sphinx, locking onto Clint.

"It may surprise you, but I've spent more time on Midgard than Thor." Loki, distracted, lined up his second shot on the four and missed.

Clint sighed with relief; he could rally. It probably should have surprised him, but the difference in their speech patterns made it apparent. Though Clint did wonder why he did spend more time on Earth. He doubted Fancy Pants and Loki played billiards while 'treasure questing'.

Clint circled around, avoiding grazing past Thor. He had a good shot on the thirteen, then from there probably the twelve, if he was lucky, the ten. That would leave them with only the fourteen, and Loki and Nat with the one, the four, and the seven.

"Aye, Loki spent many decades on Midgard especially after all the De—" Thor began and was hit by barb of Christmas scented green magic, silencing him. His mouth moved but no words came out, like one of those dying Furbys his niece, Chloe, had once.

Clint twisted around to an alarmed Loki. With eyebrows raised, he ran a finger across his throat in a clear 'cut it out' action.

Oh c'mon Loki…

Nat and Clint looked back to Thor in confusion. Loki released his magic and Thor coughed and continued. "—Divine festivities on Asgard bored him." Thor recovered, and Loki relaxed. Obviously that was not what Thor originally wanted to say.

"You both are a walking daytime drama." Clint shook his head, lined up his shot and sunk the thirteen with ease. Take that! Clint wound around the table again. His hip not so accidentally, swishing across Loki's. He lined up his shot on the twelve, pocketing it in the side as well.

"You've got some skill at this game as well, Clint." Loki purred from behind him and Clint fought the instinct to snap up. Loki had been so close to him the hairs on his neck were tickled by the fan of his breath.

"Yeah, my brother Nate taught me…and there wasn't exactly a lot to do in Iowa." Clint managed a bittersweet smile, remembering his older brother's lessons. Clint zoned back to shrug off the tingling feeling in his spine from Loki. He lined up his shot on the ten, sinking it third in the corner pocket. Clint raised up from the table, Nate would be proud of that hard shot.

He caught Loki roving over his chest like a tailor measuring him for a suit, as if sensing his hidden somber mood. Clint lined up a defensive shot and hit the fourteen off the bumper, having no real shot.

"I don't know Clint, you could, well, go to the state fair." Nat jabbed good-heartedly, making a theater joke to alleviate his mood. She knew about Nate. She gracefully lined up her shot up on the one, a tough one, and sunk in the side pocket. She flitted around to the other side, next to Thor, and downed the four.

Damn, this wasn't looking good. Clint crossed his fingers secretly as he saw Nat miss the seven, ricocheting off to a good position for Loki for his inevitable ball in hand.

"Alright Thor, just focus on keeping the ball on the table. Think…dainty." Clint suggested and Thor furrowed his eyebrows.
"Aye hawk's eye, dainty like a...stag. A violet, toaster-pastry eating one." Clint bit his lip from laughing at the jab towards Loki.

Loki sighed dramatically, muttering something to Nat under his breath that made her lips tilt.

Thor bent down, lining up a shot on the fourteen. This time they made sure no one was opposite Thor for his shot. Clint didn't even bother looking. But when he heard a clack he pricked his head up.

The fourteen rolled hit the rail and almost into the pocket, blocking the eight.

"Nice! You set up a good defensive play." Clint went up for, what Thor would appreciate, a high five. Thor took it graciously.

"Better than your first shot, which might not be saying much." Steve congratulated. Loki straightened, looking serious. By this time Sesshomaru had managed to escape Tony's interrogation and moved around to the commotion placidly.

"I shall win the game here." Loki said without any hesitation, but without any excitement, concentration written across his brow.

'It's like he is playing with something to prove. What I have no idea, we already know is a damn good player.' Clint watched as Loki whipped the pool cue behind his back, sitting on the pool table, one long leg dangling, the other stretched out like a dancer's to the floor.

Clint then understood what Loki meant by his advantages in battle were flexibility. Clint's face heated up slightly from the thought of thinking of another man's, especially Loki's, flexibility. Loki sank the most difficult shot of the night on the remaining seven with style.

"You know Loki, if the whole Demi-God thing isn't your speed you can always become a pro billiards player." Bruce offered and Loki smiled, though his eyes stayed on Clint who took a sip of his watered down whiskey ginger, defensively.

"Oh, I don't think something like that is in the cards." Loki replied cryptically, again like a sphinx and lined up a bank shot on the eight. "Eight ball side pocket." He tapped the side pocket with his cue, leaned over, dark hair shining, jacked back and released.

The cue clicked against the eight, bouncing it off the proper bumper...only to stop just short.

"Close, but no cigar, Glow-Stick." Nat nodded, almost as if conceding defeat.

"Close, but no cigar, Glow-Stick." Nat nodded, almost as if conceding defeat.

"It seems Thor and I have opposing problems." Loki admitted, with a small, disappointed twitch of his lips. Clint could tell by Loki's dim eyes and scrunched nose that he really wanted that win. But as much as wanting Loki to lighten up appealed to Clint, denying Loki a no-holds-barred bet over him appealed greater.

Clint lined up the easy shot on the fourteen, and sunk it finally. 'Take that cursed green ball, and your green ice cream too.' Clint grinned and cycled around to the eight, feeling all eyes on him. 'Oh yeah Clint, no pressure, if you miss Nat will surely get it.' Clint knew again it was a tricky shot. He had to just barely kiss the eight to make it in.

"Eight ball side pocket." Clint tapped the pocket and eyeballed the shot. Out of his periphery he saw Loki's flickering green eyes, smooth cream skin, and raven hair hunt him like a predator. Clint hair stood at attention on the back of his neck, but not from fear. He his skin prickled and his throat
dried up. Even the air in his lungs went stale. The pressure was on; he would not let Loki mess with his game.

Attempting to ignore Loki, and failing miserably, he licked his lips and pulled back the cue and released it.

The cue ball went a hair wide, missing the eight ball entirely, landing in the corner pocket.

Clint winced, especially seeing Loki’s eyes ignite once more.

'To lose scratching on the eight ball! Just my luck.' Clint slumped over the table in defeat and he heard Loki and Nat laugh, and by the sound of it, high five. Clint pushed back off the table, looking at Thor.

"It was a valiant effort Hawks-eye! Superb job dear brother and Lady Romanoff, to the victors go the spoils!" Thor raised his glass, Clint did the same, one day they would have a rematch.

"Team Slythrin reigns supreme." Nat quirked her full lips. Damn her, she just had to rub it in didn't she?

"Wait, we're still doing the Harry Potter thing? So, who are they?" Tony asked, voice clear, as if he had barely touched any liquor.

"They are Team Griffindor. You and Bruce would definitely be Ravenclaw, which…" Nat trailed off after figuring out who was left and which house they belonged to. "…Leaves Steve and Pretty Boy as Hufflepuff." Nat deducted. Tony pointed between Sesshomaru and Steve a few times, which caused Bruce to rub his temples. Steve looked a bit confused, Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow, slicing a sickle of a gaze to Steve.

Clint leaned back against the pool table, knowing the whole Harry Potter thing got blasted out of proportion.

"Huh. Capsicle and Sailor Moon…on a team. Well, I think we all know which team wouldn't win 'best teamwork' trophy." Tony finally concluded. Steve shot an indignant glare his way.

"I must admit; they are not the most compatible team present. The ever amiable Captain and the imposing Demon." Loki said as he prowled around the pool table to stand next to Clint. Loki and Thor shared a knowing glance. Steve crossed his built arms and Sesshomaru's face looked stony, ears low.

Clint could catch on that neither Steve nor Sesshomaru particularly enjoyed being poked fun at. Especially since Fancy Pants, per usual, had no idea what they were talking about. He didn't even know if Steve had read or watched Harry Potter.

"Hmm yeah, the two most principled military officers I've met, and who have had to adapt to the 21st century, definitely have nothing in common.” Clint defended, and Nat tilted her head to the side. That caused Tony's mirth to catch short, eyes trained on him like a laser sight. Steve straightened.

"Also the house that values hard-work, patience, loyalty, and honor sounds especially unlike them…. What?! My niece and nephew did the sorting hat thing!" Clint put his hands up in defense of the suspicious and confused stares sent his way. Yeah, a grown guy knows about Harry Potter, so what?! Sesshomaru, in the back, put his hand to his chin.

Pause.
"This Sesshomaru approves of this...team." Sesshomaru nodded slowly and Clint smiled noticing Steve's eyebrows shoot up.

Clint absorbed the moment, all of them having a good time. It was nice. And ironically, Hawkeye, never saw something like this coming. It felt strangely 'breakfast club-esque'.

"Let's pack it in so as Tony puts it, the 'Scamtastic Four', can head out." Bruce suggested, everyone downed whatever they had left of their drinks and slowly filed out.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Loki flash another genuine smile, and Clint so he wouldn't have to decide which facial expression to make, took another sip of drink only to find ice left.

Clint poured milk into his cereal bowl. He didn't hate waiting. As a trained sniper, more than half of his job included waiting. Now, though, he felt fidgety, and bored. Probably Loki's fault.

He already practiced archery down in the training room, already made Loki's music playlist. Clint, not as clever as naming things as Stark was, named it Mischief Music. It would do.

It also didn't help that he had another awkwardly disastrous conversation with Loki right before he left for Asgard. He honestly didn't mean to be such a dick to him. It just came out.

He also didn't expect it to eat at his gut like bad Chinese food. He never even really apologized for saying it. He didn't even mean it but he could tell by the stricken look that Loki's face blanked into that he took it to heart. It wasn't true, Loki did have a moral code. He went through hell to save Earth.

And Clint watched as he volunteered to waltz right back into hell.

He had suspected Loki hadn't him the truth about what Odin, Allfather, whoever, would do to him. It made his blood itch. Loki wasn't supposed to lie to him.

Almost out of spite, and to clear his own mind Clint, yesterday he asked Fancy Pants, under his breath, what Odin could, or would do to Loki.

His response chilled him from the outside of his ribs inward.

"Odin is capable of swift and lasting cruelty. If he so chose, he could curse, condemn, or even kill Loki with ease." Sesshomaru stated as if he asked him for the score of last night's hockey game.

"You think he'd really kill Loki?" Clint hadn't expected such a concrete heavy response.

"Odin is blind. In two days' time we will learn if he is also deaf." Sesshomaru's glacial tone pricked the hairs on the backs of his triceps.

"What if he doesn't listen? What if they come back without Loki?" Clint asked and he monitored the composed demon lord as his talons twitched.

"Then one way or another, Odin will feel Bakusaiga's steel against his aging throat." Sesshomaru promised voice smooth as silk and Clint believed his words.

So he was an inexcusable jerk to someone whose father may kill him. Awesome.

He had a knack for unintentionally riling the God up, or knocking the wind from his sails.
The God of Mischief really didn't deserve it. Even though he would mess, annoy, stalk, surprise, and toy with Clint with on purpose. Again, why Clint had no idea. He didn't lavish anyone else with his downright weird attentions. Clint had mulled it over all yesterday, and decided it just had to be because of how much he learned about him through the scepter.

He told Loki, whether he wanted to or not, a lot about himself. Loki knew more about him than the other avengers, Clint figured. They spent the most time together, so it made sense that Loki would feel comfortable pushing his buttons more than anyone else.

It also didn't hurt that Clint probably had a healthy dose of patience for his borderline seductive antics. Well, most of his antics. The teleportation got him every damn time.

'Seriously, if that 'as theatre as Broadway' God teleports away from me mid-conversation again I'll find him and shoot him with a tracker arrow.' Clint vowed emptily.

It occurred to Clint, of course, after Loki left and after his sobering conversation with Sesshomaru that Loki hadn't probably sought him out just to annoy him, but also probably to ease his nerves.

Super Clint. Way to help the mission by kicking Loki when he was already down.

Yet, it wasn't the fact he may have potentially jeopardized the mission that gnawed at Clint's conscience. It was the fact he really didn't want to see Loki go through anything more than he already had.

It was also the blood thinning sensation that the conversation he had could be his last with Loki. That he might not come back.

Clint had no idea what to do with that jarring possibility. He tried to distract himself and pass the time, but time flowed as slow as molasses in an Iowa winter.

It didn't help everyone else had jobs to do. He and Nat decided for him to not contact Fury until she returned planet-side. Tony had his smarty-pants workshop, still messing around with his proximity barrier thing and the weaponized toxins, trying to make them test-status ready.

Bruce was helping him with the toxins, keeping him sane, preventing him from blowing something up, or all of the above.

'The toxins, to be honest, sound pretty damn awesome if I can put either of the two toxins on my arrows. Any advantage over thermos and the goon squad is much appreciated.' Clint took his breakfast of raisin bran to the balcony. 'Two scoops of raisins my ass.' The balcony was just too quiet.

Clint was sure Fancy Pants was off doing something mysterious with that toad of his. Yesterday they took off soon after the 'Scamtastic Four' left and still hadn't come back since yesterday. He didn't say where he was going which of course irritated 'I'm in everybody's business' Tony Stark.

'Well, no actually, more like, I'm in a certain Demon Lord's business' Tony Stark' Clint corrected himself.

'Come to think of it, I haven't seen Tony surface from his smarty pants workshop either. Definitely no coincidence there, with no Fancy Pants he needs something to do. Smarty Pants and Fancy Pants. Ha, I could do comedy.' Clint smiled at his own joke.

Clint wasn't too sure about Tony's borderline obsession with the guy. The fact this guy was a closed book probably just riled the hell out of him. Also that he couldn't get a rise out of the guy to
save his life. But boy could Fancy Pants put him in orbit.

The same orbit that a certain God of Mischief could put Clint into. His muscles itched for a good work out as he remembered pulling Loki up off the floor of the gym, glistening, strong yet in that flash of a moment, vulnerable.

'I could use a good spar, but I guess I'll have to wait for Loki to come back. Because he will come back. No way would Thor let anything happen to Loki this time around. Or Nat. Then again Fancy Pants knew they were going with him…. No. Stay positive. Thor is the God of Thunder. He has Mjolnir and his father likes him. If Odin won't listen to Loki, he will listen to Thor. Or like I told Loki, if Odin tries something Fancy Pants and I will fight our way through Asgard. I do need my spar partner back.' Clint scowled at his soggy cereal. Raisin bran never stayed crisp for long.

'What Loki and I have, while a little counter-intuitive, works. It'd be a pain in my ass to explain how the Fight Club system to someone else, and not everyone likes my music even though it's great. Nat won't even listen to Kanye; she thinks he's totally a stuck up douchebag, which is beside the point.' Clint took a sip of lukewarm coffee. 'Good to the last drop my ass.' Clint sneered at his coffee. Ok, maybe he was a bit more than antsy. Maybe he was just in a bad mood.

'Plus, we already have a good rhythm going, and sparring against Steve would just get me throttled. His music he works out to is boring too. 'the 1812 Overture' for punching something?! It'd just be pointless to spar with anyone else, wouldn't be as good. I'll be sure to lay him out again next spar. Because there will be a next spar. Maybe I'll just jog? Ugh that sounds miserable may-' Clint got thrown from his rationalization by the silence.

'I existed once. I truly did. You know that.' Loki's voice echoed deep in his mind and Clint twisted his face to banish the words. Clint started to resent the quiet he, before days ago, had no problem with.

"Wanna see a baseball game today?!" Clint jumped out of his skin. Steve walked up to him, the smell of eggs made Clint's mouth water. Steve, by contrast, ate a balanced and complete breakfast of pancakes, eggs, toast and orange juice. So him.

"I'm...not too much of a baseball fan, NHL hockey is more my speed. Go Chicago Blackhawks!" Clint took a spoonful of his disappointing raisin bran. He heard that Bruce made breakfast for everyone the other day, lucky bastards. They also got story time about Sesshomaru's past, which Steve caught him up on yesterday.

'Fancy Pants' dad definitely threw him in the deep end to learn to swim. Not that his is the only sob story around here, and it did sound like he handled the situation well. He skinned his uncle and aunt and made an outfit out them and hung them up to gloat. And decapitated some tiger guy and shot his head out a catapult. Fancy Pants definitely took the 'does not play well with others’ mantle from Tony.' Clint's thoughts rambled.

"Aw C'mon. They're playing the Nats again. Game is in like three hours, what else you got going on?" Steve basically pleaded, maybe just as bored and Clint found himself relenting. Really what else did he have to do? Sit around and wait to see if Loki would come back?

Until. Until he came back.

"I guess you're right. I don't have anything to lose. I'm rooting against you though. Captain America rooting against the DC team? What would the Nation think?!" Clint stretched and Steve looked at him in fake dejection.
"Well prepare to be disappointed. We are really gonna wallop them this time!" Steve took a bite of his pancakes, he didn't even put syrup on them, savage.

"Wallop? Really Elmer Fudd? Waskly wabbit!" Clint caught a piece of toast Steve threw and threw it back hitting him between the eyes.

Steve frowned and Clint shrugged and finished his cereal.

"Funny. Funny. It will be great. we haven't really hung out that much." Steve cheerfully took another bite of his pancakes and Clint got up to put his bowl in the dishwasher in the kitchen nook.

So, not only was Steve bored but he was probably going stir crazy in Stark Tower too.

"Yeah, well we belong to different sororities so, you know different mixers. I'll see you in a few." Clint waved and left the balcony, itching for a workout or something.

He got to the gym where Loki and he sparred and went towards the squat rack.

'Sun don't shine in the shade
Bird can't fly in a cage
Even when somebody go away
The feelings don't really go away
That's just the wave'

Despite thrashing tempo of Kanye West's "Waves" he still rewound through his nightmare from last night like an old VCR player.

Most of the times when he had nightmares they were about Budapest, sometimes Tripoli, Sarajevo, a few times his fights in Myanmar. Once he had a nightmare he was being chased by velociraptors, Clint blamed Nat taking him to see Jurassic World for that one.

The worst one was always what happened before he picked up a bow for anything besides buck hunting. Which, come to think of it, Loki turning into a stag, him being an avid bow hunter…there had to be some sort of metaphor hidden there.

But back on track, the worst nightmare was about his older brother Nate.

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Clint awoke in the middle of the night. Again. He had that itching feeling that his brother, Nate, had snuck out again. He peeled back the covers and looked around their shared room.

His side of the room was covered in crinkled, aged posters. He taped up mostly Metallica, some Nine Inch Nails, a couple Marilyn Manson, and a big Pantera one all over the smudged white walls.

Clint didn't really like any of those bands or musicians, but he pretended he did because Nate loved them. Nate had cassettes of their albums tossed all over the floorboard of their old f-150.

Nate would say, in between Camel cigarettes, listening to them put his 'shitbox' job and his troubles all into perspective. Whatever that really meant.

Nate was only a couple years older than he was, but he always acted like some hotshot adult. He was only seventeen, but had to drop out of high school to work to help out their family ever since
dad got laid-up.

As he predicted, Nate's bed was empty, but unpredictably made. Nate never made his bed even when he was repeatedly grounded for it.

That should have been a sign.

Clint slipped out of bed, changed into some acid wash jeans and tugged on his old converse chucks. If Nate had snuck out again, he wanted to go too.

He avoided the center of the stairs, they always creaked. And like a ninja in the kung-fu movies they always watched together, he crept out the kitchen door.

The trucks were still in the gravel driveway. Nate was probably down by the creek smoking weed again. He said it was the only thing that leveled him out.

Clint stomped on the crunchiest leaves he could find all the way down to the creek bed less than an eighth of a mile from their house. It was a pretty warm October night and the moon was full. Clint could see why Nate would want to sneak out.

He spotted Nate in the mottled moonlight facing away from him right at the creek bed. Nate always said he had super-human eye-sight. He could spot any deer in the forests when hunting.

Clint knew better than to call out from this distance, besides it was a rare opportunity that he had the chance to sneak up on his always-alert, hunter, older brother.

Nate raised his hand. Clint didn't have to rub the crusty sleep out of his eyes to know in it was his Beretta.

Clint's lungs froze solid. As naturally as one would scratch their temple Nate put the gun to his and pulled the trigger.

The sharp crack of the gunshot echoed for years.

Clint's throat was raw from screaming as he ran downhill. He slipped on dead leaves and his knees hit the sand that had already absorbed so much of Nate's blood.

Clint shook and quivered, adrenaline and shock raced through his veins like needles.

"No, god why. No god why. Nate, Nate stay with me." Clint barely stomached the smell of raw metallic blood and fleshy brain matter.

He didn't stomach the glassed, unfocused eyes of his all-knowing older brother, nor how the other side of his head had erupted out like in a bad horror movie. Shame flooded his system. He should have seen this coming. He should have prevented it. They were best friends.

He heard his mother's wail. He was thankful his mother found them before his kid brother, Jake, did.

The words he screamed in his nightmares were always different than what he chanted like a priest nineteen years ago.

Last night he awoke screaming "Not again, no!" He didn't know how to psychoanalyze that. He didn't know anyone who was suicidal. Maybe it meant nothing at all.

All he knew was he wasn't going back to sleep and there wasn't a God in the kitchen nook hungry
for something that wasn't pop-tarts.

After a disappointing workout, an uneventful shower, and dicking around on Tony's TiVo buying and queuing up all the demonic possession, Broadway Musicals, and Robert Downey Jr movies he could find, he and Steve set out for Yankee Stadium.

"I'll buy your ticket! My treat!" Steve genuinely smiled, not that Steve as he ever did anything not genuine, and got out of the taxi.

"Thanks sweetie, but that doesn't mean I'm putting out during the seventh inning stretch in the clubhouse." Clint winked and Steve huffed.

"You couldn't seriously handle me anyway." Steve shot back and Clint laughed. They paid for their tickets, decent ones on the first base line. After going through security and maneuvering around like a million fat New Yorkers and screaming kids, they found their seats, right on the first base line.

"So, how are you dealing with everything?" Steve sounded nervous, and Clint turned his way confused. What did that mean?

"Huh? You mean figuring out that this asshat Titan, Thermos, or whatever is planning to kill everyone on our planet again? Peachy. He'll show up, and we will shut the door in his face and kick him to next Tuesday." Clint shrugged, wanting to get up get a beer, maybe a Shock Top? Ooh, and a corn dog. Fair food was the best. He liked it still even after working in the circus for years. Any food on a stick Clint was a fan of. Popcicles, corn dogs, kebobs, all epic. Ice cream sort of counted. Maybe they have mint chocolate chip here...

"No, I mean about Loki. You, um, did hate him for a long time, and did shoot him with a bunch of arrows." Steve stammered, looking at Clint with concern and Clint rolled his head in exasperation.

"Really Steve? Is that why you wanted to go to this baseball game to play Dr. Rogers, therapist to the super spies?" Clint leaned back, waiting to hear Steve's justification.

"And everyone, stand up for our National Anthem, sung by none other than, Scotty McCreery!" The sound system boomed and girls crooned. Who is Scotty McCreery?

"No, I really wanted to go to this game with you. I'm just concerned is all. A lot has happened this week, it's a lot to take in for all of us. I mean, Demons are real and aren't evi-" Steve quieted when this talentless hack began to butcher the Star Spangled Banner.

'Steve looks like he wants to punch this singer in the face. Oh man his face is getting red. This is terrific. They can never find anyone who can just sing the damn song without trying to make it into some huge grandstanding, warbling mess.' Clint sighed heavily as the song ended.

"Wow that was just beautiful. I loved the way he hit 'free' off key don't you? Really brought the song home." Clint smiled wide as Steve's face took on a tomato's in hue.

"As I was saying, Demons exist and they aren't evil. Our number one enemy turned out to be not our enemy and friends with a Demon Lord. And...I don't know. Things just got so complicated and now we have to not only fend off another invasion, but convince everyone it's going to happen!" Steve scratched his head and Clint felt for him a little, he was their fearless leader and he got thrown for a huge loop.
"Listen, yeah it sounds like a lot, but I mean Fancy Pants isn't all that bad. Sure he arrogant as all get out and near-impossible to read, even Nat thinks so, but he drives Tony nuts. Also he is the first guy to make a whip look cool since Indiana Jones." Clint offered, purposely avoiding the topic of Loki.

"I don't have a problem with him. He is sharp, level-headed, calm, and intelligent. And with Loki and Tony in the mix we need more…stable personalities." Clint nodded to that, Tony and Loki didn't exactly scream predictable behavior. "I just thought Demons were made up and evil before this. But he isn't, neither is Jaken. And, neither is Loki." Steve explained, watching the Nationals hitter, Taylor, swing and miss the first pitch. Steve clapped and hooted.

'Steve cheers like a little kid.' Clint grinned.

"Yeah, and about Loki, like...yeeesh. I'll figure myself out. He isn't head-case crazy like I thought, which is in our favor. I can see why Thor and Fancy Pants liked him before the whole Chitauri mess. But yeah, we got this. We got some time. I'm sure Nat will convince SHIELD to come around, and we will get everyone on board and show this Titan who's boss." Clint slapped Steve reassuringly on the shoulder and got up. His pep-talk to Steve even got his spirits up.

"Imma go get a beer and a corn dog, want anything?" Clint began to make his way out.

"Um, yea, cheeseburger and a Coke is fine for now. Uh wait, this might sound crazy, but I think Tony likes him, like more than just as...uh as a friend." Clint stopped in his tracks. Tony? Tony 'I can get anyone into my overpriced monogrammed four billion thread count red silk sheets' Stark wants Loki?! Clint whipped around so quickly he hit his knee against a cup holder. He didn't register the pain.

"Tony and Loki?!" Clint's eyebrows must have hit his hairline from shock. What had Steve seen? Did he see Tony and Loki? Together? When?! The nerve of Tony, go find some vapid fan of yours. Loki doesn't need your mess; he is already a mess enough.

"No, no, no, not Loki, Sesshomaru. And that could be a problem." Steve corrected, blue eyes searching for vindication. Clint relaxed, mind clearing like wind sweeping out clouds. That made a lot more sense, Clint shook out his suddenly tense muscles.

"Oh, Fancy Pants! I doubt it, I think Tony just likes puzzles and that guy, as my younger brother would say, 'bafflefucks' him. Nice gossip topic though Joan Rivers." Clint winked at Steve and he flushed as a foul ball hit the batters cage. Clint exhaled deeply maneuvering to get the food.

The next few innings went by smoothly, four runs batted in, three by the Nationals much to Steve's dismay and Clint's ignorant bragging.

"Oh look, that Nationals player got back to that one white square. That's a run right or is it a goal? Do you think that one Yankee player dropped the catch on purpose?!" Clint would yell and Steve got up to sit a seat away from him to avoid his purposeful jeering. Clint decided he liked baseball live, just not on TV, and Steve was a hoot to watch cheer.

"It's the bottom of the fifth, one out, and Castro is up to plate!" The loudspeaker boomed his walk up song and Steve cheered. Strasburg wound up and pitched and the ball went high and fowl right above where Steve and Clint sat.

Clint looked up, spotting the ball and something else, a tiny fiery blur against the blue sky. It soon expanded in size, and started to rumble like a rock slide. The stadium even quaked a bit, red dust rose off the field like in a windstorm.
Everyone in the stadium jumped to their feet, gasping, pointing, and screaming. Dread clinched Clint's gut like a vice. This is a deathtrap. People are going to trample each other like in the Lion King.

Total FUBAR situation.

"I thought Loki said we had like another two months!" Steve jumped into action, face serious and blue eyes trained on the incoming bogey.

"I guess they took a shortcut. Maybe an ez-pass turnpike opened up!" Clint's humor was strained as he realized this was the worst possible timing. Loki, who knew the most about their enemy, Thor their strongest fighter, well besides the Hulk, and Nat, the only one who could talk sense into Fury, were gone. They were in another dimension. Cool.

"And Fancy Pants, the only one who may be able to do anything against these guys has been M.I.A. for the past thirty hours. Not that we have seen him do much outside rhythmic gymnastics anyway. A total Charlie Foxtrot.‘ Clint picked up a chubby child that had fallen and Steve leapt up to get a better view.

"Protecting the safety of the people here is our best priority for now. We need to contact SHIELD, we need backup." Steve stressed and Clint groaned, reaching for his cell phone.

"Let's go to a baseball game Steve said. Sure! Of course, I can enjoy a normal baseball game like a normal person without an alien invasion happening." Clint muttered, the fiery smoke broke and revealed a spaceship, not unlike the shape of a star destroyer from Star Wars they ironically watched last night, but smaller, sleeker maybe the size of a small cruise ship.

"Do you have any weapons on you?!" Steve shouted as people started to panic and bolt like frightened horses he once had to help corral as a kid.

"Yeah, the security guy totally let me bring my bow and explosive arrows in for signatures." Clint smiled darkly. "At least Fury has his proof! How the hell do we get out of here?!" Clint got bumped by a Yankees fan and his cell phone went flying, Clint didn't care, like anyone on the other line would be able to hear him over the screaming.

Clint Barton and Steve Rogers, two of Earth's mightiest heroes, were sitting ducks for an invasion they knew was coming. Shit creek, meet no paddle.

"I don't know; it looks like there is only one ship! We need Tony and Bruce…and Sesshomaru!" Steve's voice, while commanding was higher than normal. As if on cue, like in a damn movie, Tony flew over the ballpark, holding Clint's bow and quiver and Steve's shield.

People, cheered, settling down some.

"Don't panic folks the Avengers have this under control." Tony's voice projected over the stadium. However, people also stopped panicking because the sleek black ship made a sharp bank left and drifted slowly South, but not before the familiar chariots swarmed out of its hull.

"Iron Man delivery at your service, Amazon drone delivery eat your heart out." Tony descended and tossed him his shield, and Clint his bow and quiver.

"Thanks Tony I owe you…how did you find us so fast?!" Steve asked as he strapped on his shield.

"You wouldn't sit anywhere else except good seats at the first base line." Tony probably winked under his faceplate. Clint didn't buy it. "I also gps tracked Legolas' phone since you can't seem to
remember to keep yours charged. Speaking of which, here some coms." Clint laughed a bit and Steve clenched his fist as if to say 'Not now.' Clint put his com in.

"I'm going to calm the people on the streets, you two go after the ship, I'll join up shortly." Steve ordered and Tony mock-saluted. With his shield in hand, Steve made his way through the crowd.

"Do you have any idea where Fancy Pants is? Is Bruce out there?" Clint strapped on his quiver and slung his bow over his shoulder. He felt invigorated with a flash of adrenaline. So much for a boring couple days

"My tracker puts Sailor Moon in Central Park, near the Bethesda Pavilion, probably on a hot date with that Soul Cycle instructor." Clint swore Tony's voice sounded a touch more annoyed than probably intended. "Bruce is hulking there as we speak. Hold on tight and don't let go Rose!" Tony grabbed Clint in a tight embrace, much to Clint's disgust especially at the Titanic reference, and they blasted off in pursuit of the space cruiser.

"I should have stuck to hockey." Clint adjusted, grabbed his bow, and with Tony holding him around the waist, knocked an arrow and let it fly just as the first of the chariots left the mother ship. The arrow struck the pilot of the first Chariot, sending him falling down to the asphalt below.

Clint repeated the same for the two passengers on the Chariot who were curiously speeding past them.

"Tony dump me off onto that Chariot, I'm gonna do some damage." Clint ordered and Tony reared back, dropping Clint off on the rapidly descending chariot. Clint pulled up harsh on the joystick, leveling out the vehicle before it smacked into a building.

"Alright, it's just like riding a bike." Clint fired a harpoon arrow into its hull and tied the joystick in place, allowing him to fly and snipe at the same time with minimal steering.

Knocking back a taser arrow, Clint aimed quick and unleashed the arrow at a passing Chariot, disabling it. Immediately he knocked back three arrows, wishing he had some of that magic countering toxin about now, and with a twang of a bowstring he hit all three. And like dominoes the Chitauri plummeted to the sidewalk below, shrieks cutting into the air.

"Heads up!" He shouted down to the scattering New Yorkers below, which after the first Battle of New York had begun to really understand the concept of duck and cover.

That and Steve down below had done an amazing job at keeping people off the streets and away from windows. Steve flung his shield at the smoking Chariot, knocking it harmlessly off course into a fire hydrant, stopping it cold.

"Nice pitch!" Clint yelled below, before swinging to his six and launching another explosive arrow at the Chariot tailing him. A Chariot that should have fired upon him by now.

'OK, maybe Loki was just a really good fake general and the Chitauri are useless otherwise or these guys are treating me like I don't exist.' Clint squinted as the Chariot he shot began to smoke and the three Chitauri on it hopped to another nearby Chariot, not even bothering to shoot at him. They were all speeding off towards Central Park, where Tony said Fancy Pants was.

Clint, realizing he was creating more harm than good, drifted down to the asphalt in front of Steve.

"They're completely ignoring me. Looks like they're going after Fancy Pants in Central Park, hop on I'll give you a ride." Clint instructed and Steve leapt on, expression determined but grim.
As soon as Clint steered the chariot upwards to regain his view of the Chitauri ship he heard a distant roar. It sounded like a hydroelectric dam breaching and vibrated his core like one too.

A primal fear drilled through the marrow of his bones as the roar vacuumed into an eerie silence.

An uncontrollable instinct made his shoulders hunch and close his eyes. It was a long dormant, biological reaction that trumped every ounce of training he had ever received.

Clint looked up at the same time Steve did, both rigid as statues. A surging, torrential green plasma ray streaked across the sky as wide as a subway car. It radiated the sky in crackling, iridescent lightning and in a flash dozens or so of the Chitauri who soared above the city were vaporized.

One partially hit Chitauri screeched as the rest of his body corroded and eventually tumbled from the chariot only to dissipate before he hit the pavement.

The enemy cut through its own forces like a hot knife through butter. Why? Shit. Tony!

"Tony, come in. Tony you still kickin'?" Clint held his breath as his ear receiver filled with static. Steve also listened in, eyes still surveying the electrically charged air. Clint's mouth went dry and knees a bit rubbery. No way could they deal with a ship that could dish out that much firepower. It corroded people!

Talk about a Death Star. Not even SHIELD had a weapon capable of that.

Clint ascended their Chariot above the buildings and saw the space ship not two blocks from them, slowly creeping towards Central Park as if waiting for something.

A shaky exhale parted Clint's lips as he spotted a flash of crimson in the distance. The ship missed Tony; he was always the luckiest of bastards.

"I see Tony! He's fine. The energy blast must have messed with our coms." Clint reported and Steve nodded.

They had to stop that ship before it fired down towards the city…wait.

Fired down. Clint bucked the Chariot high up above the buildings. The blast came from the south, invading ship was still facing south, away from them. Also, the blast only hit the Chitauri. Clint smelled no smoke and maybe aside from a pigeon, nothing else was harmed.

Maybe that green blast hadn't come from the ship at all.

"Clint! They didn't have anything like that three years ago. This doesn't even look like the ships Loki told us about! We need to get closer to destroy that ship before it fires at the city! One of those blasts could raze ten blocks, and the civilian casualties would be astronomical." Steve's voice held an edge of panic Clint caught. Clint began to put the pieces together.

"You mean 'we' didn't have anything like this three years ago." Clint didn't blame Steve in the least for not noticing the little details, his fear for the people briefly overrode his analysis. It even took him till just now to realize that he had seen that exact shade of nineties-tracksuit green before.

And Clint wasn't talking about Will Smith's windbreaker on the 'Fresh Prince of Bel Air.'

Clint started to chuckle. They weren't up shit creek without a paddle, they had a goddamn speedboat.
"Clint this isn't the time for jokes, approach the spaceship, we will distract it long enou—" Clint pointed past the ship caused Steve to pause in his order.

"Steve that blast came from the south, where the ship is headed. And did that shade of green look familiar to you? Like a certain, toxin or whip? Or even scry-nado?" Clint turned to Steve, eyes lit up. "That's no space station, it's Sailor Moon." Clint mimicked Obi Wan and opted for Tony's name for the Demon Lord, for quotations sake.

Steve's eyes bugged out a bit as Clint accelerated the chariot towards Central Park.

"That. That's what he is capable of?!!" Clint couldn't tell if Steve was terrified or ecstatic. Probably both.

"Old Dog, New Tricks. You should be able to relate to that." Clint smirked and Steve sighed. Poor guy, he really must feel in over his head. "Let's get going Mr. Old Fashioned." Clint pressed the throttle all the way down. Pedal to the metal.

"…As you said earlier, let's kick these Chitauri to next Tuesday." Steve rolled his shoulders and readied his shield which Clint interpreted as Steve finally getting his groove back.

Chapter End Notes

Finally! We are getting some Clint, and some action! :)

Also, I am going back and editing through some of the earlier chapters. I hope you enjoyed this!

-TL
Sesshomaru and the Statue of Liberty

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sesshomaru and the Statue of Liberty

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Sesshomaru was thankful for the time given to him by Loki's and Rin's absence. Not that he preferred them in the Distant Realm, but he needed time to assess the information that he had gleaned from Loki's and his conversation on Stark's rooftop.

He had a sneaking suspicion that Loki left some critical parts out of his recent history, but that's how their conversations had always been.

Most of the topics Loki had informed him of had indeed been somewhat interesting or the very least entertaining. Sending a Destroyer after Thor? Hasty. Assassinating that savage King Laufey and his bumbling troop of ice dwellers? Clever. A minor detail in a story of him coming under the dominion of Thanos and the Other piqued his interest.

"After falling from the Bifrost, the Other collected me from Sanctuary. After his… treatment of me. The Mad Titan offered me an exchange, I would obtain the Tesseract for him and he would give me rule of Midgard." Loki twirled a dagger lazily.

"… Tesseract?" Sesshomaru tongued the foreign word.

"A cosmic cube housing a gem, one of six, of limitless power. The Tesseract creates portals. It is the current obsession of the Mad Titan and one of the reasons for his conquest of Midgard and Asgard." Loki replied without much flourish.

"So, that is what spurned forth the attentions of a Titan Warlord across the cosmos." Sesshomaru's brow creased, Loki had known the location of this Tesseract?

It was Naraku all over again. How did he manage to suffer two delusional creatures enraptured by some frivolous jewel? Such folly. He would show this Titan that true power is not obtained through some outside means, but from within.

"Concern yourself not of it. It is safe from the Mad Titan." Loki reassured and continued on and Sesshomaru inhaled deeply in mock annoyance.

Sesshomaru wasn't concerned. It wasn't as if this was the first time he had heard of such artifacts. He scoffed at these gems’ power and anyone who's mouth watered for them.

By nature, Sesshomaru was never curious for curiosity's sake, and if he hadn't been warned of the Six Gems of the Greater Cosmos when he was younger, he wouldn't care now.

But, on two vastly different occasions his father and mother, separately, had vaguely referenced them.

His father feared the King of the Distant Realm, Odin, obtaining one.
"Sesshomaru, you and your...friend Prince Loki go questing for magic crystals. Do you not?"
Sesshomaru frowned. It was the first time his father had ever given any remote interest in what he did with Loki outside his studies.

"We quest for various bullion." Sesshomaru responded noncommittally and his father snarled, pounding his clawed fist on the banquet table in front of them, disturbing the rice wine bottle.

"Now is not the time to play coy, boy! Your friend, Prince Loki of Asgard seeks crystals to enhance his magical abilities. Have you ever thought what he could be doing with them? Or what he may do if he finds the ones that could render our world under the Distant Realm, Asgard's thumb?" His father's voice rasped and he never sounded so rattled before. Sesshomaru's attention was piqued.

"...I am a more skilled warrior than Loki. He will fall by my hand before I would allow him to betray me." Sesshomaru found himself answering calmly, but his gut churned from his father's accusations. He cared not about what Loki did with these crystals. There would be no way Loki, nor any other Aesir, even Thor, would best him. Also, if Loki wanted him dead, he would have simply let that blasted Uru dragon slay him.

Sesshomaru and Loki differed muchly, but were also quite similar. They would always give priority to their ultimate desire: power. They respected each other in that regard. Admittedly, Loki was the only being with whom he shared the same goal, and agreed in the same method of doing so.

Loki would not betray him. If anything, Loki would invite him to take part in the dismantling or razing of whatever empire he wanted sovereignty over.

Uniting with Loki to defeat mighty generals and press some lowly peasants into their soil could be gratifying. Ruling with Loki over a realm he cared not for, however, did not.

Loki wanted power that he could hold over others, Sesshomaru wanted power he could use to be free from others.

His father sighed deeply, gulping down more rice wine.

"Sesshomaru. That did not come out as intended. I, despite my better judgment, believe your friend wishes not to use such power against you. It is his father, King Odin of the Distant Realm, who I do not trust." Inu no Taisho sounded sincere and Sesshomaru believed his father's words. While he could not sparse out lies as well as Loki, he could usually tell when his father was truthful, especially after indulging in wine. "He eyes my Sounga like a curse, it intimidates him. It is why I carry it." Sesshomaru's eyes shot wide. Only intimidate? His father dared admit such a weakness in front of him? That he could possibly not slay Odin himself?

What was this?

"Son, there are powers in this cosmos that we cannot hope to match. It's why I had you study with Prince Loki." His father poured more rice wine into his great gold goblet. His father could indeed get inebriated. Sesshomaru learned from a young age his mother's lineage gave him the ability to be immune to such mind-bending potions. His father's claws harbored no toxins, only energy cleaving youki.

His father then gripped his shoulders, his claws pricked through his yukata, eyes hard as Tessaiga's steel.

"I will entrust to you, a most dire secret. I have encountered one of these powers." Sesshomaru smelled the sake on his father's breath and knew it was only due to the spirits that his father would
speak to him as such.

He would not squander such an opportunity.

"You were bred for a purpose, not out of love nor passion. Your mother and I were selected to create, to craft perfection. A perfect weapon." His father slurped his words and Sesshomaru stood up, breaking free of his father's clutches. Bred? Like a race steed his father loved so? Is that why his mother never came down from her Kingdom? Is that why his father never whispered a kind word in his ear like so many other nobles' children he had seen?

He was never wanted. He was demanded to be.

"Bred." Sesshomaru breathed. It was too much. He had suspected something of his existence was not quite right. His father and mother were never mated, yet he was no bastard. It was quite uncustomary to produce a child when not mated, and have that child be one's heir. He had never expected his father would divulge it to him with such directness though.

"Yes. Reality has never been kind to you my son, and may never be. Centuries ago, I stumbled across a most horrifying jewel. It had to be fate, but I wish it was not so. It nearly drove me mad." His father's voice croaked with emotion Sesshomaru had certainly never witnessed. "Your mother's parents...most unique Demons, were the only ones who could assist me in locking away its limitless power. I dared not trust any of those haughty Aesir with it." Sesshomaru barely suppressed an eyebrow quirk. His father feared this artifact could fall into the wrong hands, that much was certain.

His father emptied his goblet down his worn, tan throat. He ran the back of his hand across his mouth.

"In exchange for sealing away this...ruinous relic...they demanded that your mother and I couple, and you were the result. When you are old enough, your mother will explain this further." His father didn't meet his eyes. Sesshomaru had always been taught to never cede eye contact especially with one of a lower station.

Sesshomaru took a step back, freeing himself from his father's clutches. He flared ice blue youki out across the floor. It bounced and shimmered like raindrops off marble.

'Father regrets my existence?' Sesshomaru's eyes bled red, his markings ran jagged and his fangs lengthened. A deep, quaking growl snarled from Sesshomaru's lips. All he did, all he ever endured, all he strove to become was for his father! And this?! This is what he has to say?!

"You mean to say, father, that you would have rather lost your mind to some jewel than to claim me as your son?" Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and his toxin pooled out into his whip his father detested so. His father never fully came to terms his son created and operated with a weapon typically reserved for females.

"No! Son. Again, that did not come across as intended. You ha—" Sesshomaru, for the first time in his life, interrupted his father.

"You are a weak fool father! You claim that you were to create a weapon, a perfect weapon, and you do not recognize it when it stands before you! I will surpass you! I am worth more than your warped sanity and some object you found whilst treasure questing. I am your better, I merely await the opportunity to prove it true." Sesshomaru snapped his fangs, his youki spiked blue and glimmered all around him, flooding the banquet hall.
His father's eyes, glazed over in the blue of his youki, softened. Quicker than Sesshomaru's Demon Blood driven mind could register, he embraced him roughly.

"I know son. I know." His father whispered words Sesshomaru didn't want to hear before he took Tessaiga's hilt and drove with a decisive, brutal jab into Sesshomaru's gut, rendering him unconscious.

Yesterday he sought out Jaken, when without a doubt the mischievous God went to go torment the hapless archer.

He hadn't thought of that conversation with his father in ages. It was something he pushed to the furthest corners of his mind. It was business with his father that shall always remain unfinished.

It was the first he heard a reference to of the Six Gems of the Greater Cosmos.

"Jaken. Of what do you know of the Six Gems of the Greater Cosmos?" Sesshomaru asked when he located his ward on the receiving end of one of Rin's sketching attacks. Ever since seeing Polly's 'tattoos', and his own markings on Stark, she had taken to drawing some on Jaken.

"My Lord! The Six Gems of the Greater Cosmos?! They are supposedly each on their own each an inexhaustible power source. Some Demons have claimed to possess one, but they were all found to be false! I myself do not believe in such fantasies." Jaken replied as Rin took an ink marker and drew a flower on the back of Jaken's head.

"I asked for what you knew, not what you believe." Sesshomaru warned, knuckles cracking. Jaken jumped causing Rin to frown at the ruined picture.

"Jaken hold still! I'm not done yet!" Rin stuck her tongue out in concentration and before Jaken could protest Sesshomaru shot him a stern glare to obey the girl.

"Y-y-yes my Lord! According to various ancient scrolls, the Six Gems of the Greater Cosmos each have their own unique properties and color, and all should not be collected in one place. Not much is known on them, except there was a legend that the blue one, the cosmic cube, and another, the green one were on Earth. That unfortunately is all I know Lord Sesshomaru, please forgive me." Sesshomaru sighed through his nose at Jaken's groveling.

So, it was true. How bothersome.

This made his need to find his mother's tomb that much more urgent. And even more precarious.

"My Lord, may I ask why you now inquire about these Gems?" Jaken squirmed away from Rin's ink pen.

"No, Jaken you may not. Rin gather your things; it is time to depart." Sesshomaru commanded mildly and Rin put the finishing touch on the flower on Jaken's head.

"Yes, Lord Sesshomaru!" Rin fast as can be gathered her belongings and her bone.

"Rin." Sesshomaru paused and so did Rin mid-step. Sesshomaru hesitated, he would normally never ask his ward anything of the sort, but this was important.

Sesshomaru cared not about acquiring the Gems. He needed no stones to amplify his power, he was a formidable Demon Lord and would topple his foes without such cowardly, cheating methods.
But Sesshomaru was no fool. If this Titan Warlord wished to obtain them, and Odin, had one, he would know of it. Ignorance was distasteful.

"Rin. I require something of you." His gaze hardened and Rin's eyes widened. "In the Distant Realm, if anyone, including Loki, mentions a blue power cube called the Tesseract, inform this Sesshomaru, and only this Sesshomaru, upon your return." Sesshomaru made sure his tone was soft and even to not alarm Rin.

"Mhmm! You can count on me Lord Sesshomaru! Rin is going to be a super spy just like Natasha!" Rin nodded and raised the deer femur. Sesshomaru's ears rose. There were worse humans for Rin to emulate. He shuddered at the thought of her emulating that screeching priestess who Inuyasha adored.

Sesshomaru nodded, patted her on the head, displeased at himself for a reason he could not place. Perhaps it was because he was allowing her to go. None of this sat right with the Demon Lord, but there was little he could do.

*He had to have knowledge of something substantial when he faced his mother's tomb.*

Sesshomaru knew Loki. Every crystal they recovered on their quests he showed to Odin. Loki always aspired for recognition of his work through his father. Odin never quite showered Loki with appreciation over his findings, but he responded better than his own father did.

Sesshomaru concluded this Tesseract then had to be in the Distant Realm.

Loki allowed himself to be defeated, thus he most likely left the Cosmic Cube where Thor could locate it. Not even the rather dense Thor would leave a Gem of the Greater Cosmos to humans. They'd sooner destroy themselves with it than cause any good.

Loki wouldn't have hidden the Cosmic Cube in one of his hiding places. He would have wanted Thor to bring it back to the Distant Realm so Odin could see what he had accomplished. Sesshomaru surmised Loki still wished to impress a parent, he didn't know he still wanted to impress.

Yet another thing they had in common. Which was why when he went to see his mother, he had to show her his might. His new powers and knowledge of these Gems.

"Oh. Sesshomaru! You've finally come to visit your benevolent mother, but you look a fright. Surely a 'Lord' like yourself should compose yourself better." Sesshomaru cracked the talons on his right hand. He knew what he looked like, and cared not. His body was still lacerated in scars, skin burned, and his left ear torn off to be practically useless.

*His appearance, for once, didn't matter much to him.*

"Mother." He stated, words like a frozen over river. She frowned.

"I regret your father has passed so untimely Sesshomaru. Tenseiga, where is he?" His mother stood, though shorter than Sesshomaru, she carried herself just as regally. They were nearly identical. The most visible difference being he had two straight magenta markings across his cheeks, she only had one that curled under her each of her eyes.

*Clearly, his mother's genes were dominant, but he had never seen her display any action but a small smile, a flick of a wrist, or transform.*
"I care not for that blade." Sesshomaru grounded out. He was weary. He had no time for his mother's tireless games. What use to him was a sword that could not cut?

"Tenseiga the fang of healing and the heavens and he cares for you. As well the forgers who crafted him. In time, you will see the usefulness in your father's inheritance to you. You do well to collect him before he feels rejected." His mother's voice lilted and he knew not why she referred to the blade as a male.

"Where is Sounga?" Sesshomaru demanded. Sesshomaru's mother laughter tinkled like a bell.

"Sounga?! You are not ready for Sounga. You don't even know what Sounga is!" Sesshomaru's mother's eyes once lit in mirth instantly hardened cold. "You are not near ready for your true destiny. Your father kept most of your destiny from you my child. I think he was trying to protect you from it… No matter. There is no escaping your destiny." Sesshomaru had had enough of his mother's vague riddles.

"Enough. Father has hidden Tessaiga from me, the weapon I trained on. I require Sounga."

Sesshomaru seethed, showing emotion due to sheer exhaustion. It was a wonder he was even standing.

"Do you fear the Distant Realm King Odin that much?" Sesshomaru repressed a growl. His mother always knew how to irk him. His right ear flattened.

"I see. Fret not my son. Odin will not harm you, I would most certainly make him pay if he did…" Sesshomaru's mother led purposefully but Sesshomaru would not take the bait. His mother? Stronger than Odin?

"Sesshomaru, have you heard of the Six Gems of the Greater Cosmos?" Sesshomaru's mother asked blandly, fondling her over-sized, black necklace. Sesshomaru's expression didn't change.

"Oh, and here I thought your friend Loki was teaching you about proper Gemology. The Six Gems of the Greater Cosmos are unparalleled bastions of power. With one you could topple a planet. Two, a solar system…well…I am sure you understand my point. Whoever obtains all Six Gems can make the heavens bend to their will." Sesshoamaru's mother flitted around Sesshomaru, as if sizing him up for a new wardrobe.

"I do not care for such artifacts. You did not answer my question." Sesshomaru pressed and his mother shook her head.

"My dear son, be patient. I know of the location of one of those Cosmic Gems. In fact, your father gave it to me. Odin would dare not cross me." Sesshomaru straightened. So, the artifact his father encountered that caused his birth was one of these Six Gems.

He didn't care. His mother thought herself strong due to a simple stone?!

"This Sesshomaru dislikes repeating himself. You will reveal the location of Sounga." Sesshomaru stated flatly, revealing none of his intentions as he swiped out at his mother's throat, claws long. She evaded easily and her eyes flashed red with black at the edges.

"Astral bind." Her voice ghosted, neither a scream nor a whisper. A cosmic rift above Sesshomaru tore open and from it bands of pure galaxy streamed down.

Sesshomaru dodged three artfully but in his wounded condition he succumbed to the myriad of star
and nebula mottled bands that restrained him fast. He strained his fatigued muscles against the starry, purpled bindings but to no avail.

Sesshomaru's mother approached her son, pink lips relaxed, eyes soft.

"Sesshomaru." In a most unanticipated gesture, she gently cupped his scarred, magenta striped cheek. "You have gifts beyond measure that you need to discover. You were not meant for a life wandering your father's little lands. You were intended for unparalleled greatness. Now go, retrieve Tenseiga and grow quickly, or brutally die before you even come of age. There are forces at work in the cosmos that will find and hunt us all down." Sesshomaru's mother released the astral binds on Sesshomaru. He did not lash out.

He had no idea his mother was capable of such attacks.

"This Sesshomaru does as he pleases." He glared and cracked his claws. His mother laughed heartily which only further enraged him.

"Hmm. Perhaps, I can help with that." Sesshomaru's mother smirked, eyes flashing red. She took her finger and put it to Sesshomaru's forehead. His moon turned black. "A proximity barrier skill. Do well to perfect it, even someone as weak as you can hone this skill, my dear son." His mother flashed a fang and smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes.

He would not bend to some destiny. He only did things of his own accord, though his mother did speak some truth about the proximity barrier and Tenseiga.

With his youki had fully recovered, he further trained with Bakusaiga and Tenseiga earlier that day. He remained confident he could defeat any foe, if one should arrive while Loki and Thor were in the Distant Realm of Asgard.

'That false Distant Realm. Those dense Aesir better allow Loki safe passage or I will ransom Thor for his return.' Sesshomaru almost sneered to himself. Besting the Storm God in battle did appeal to Sesshomaru.

It also appealed to him that Polly who, while on her leisure day, assisted him in acquiring the means to make purchases in this realm.

"Hey Mr Mysterious. How's kicks?" Polly greeted outside of Double Dragon Ice Cream shop, her hair now the color indigo.

"Your hair is different." Sesshomaru pointed to her haircrest.

"Yeah, it's easy for humans to change their hair colors here in this time. Got the inspiration from your moon. Don't go changing your hair though, you'd break too many hearts." Polly pointed to her own forehead.

"This Sesshomaru will not change his person." Sesshomaru affirmed, Break hearts? Sesshomaru knew of no being who cared about his hair so. Wait, no Stark also insisted he not change his hair. Odd. Why did Stark care? Evidently he prefers shoulder length, black hair.

"Good to hear, it'd be a damn shame. Where is Rin?" Polly counted one for Sesshomaru, two for Jaken, pointing to an empty spot where Rin should be with a black polished fingernail.

"Rin is with..." He paused, he couldn't just say Storm God. "others questing in the Distant Realm."
Sesshomaru assessed he could trust Polly with Rin's approximate whereabouts and activities. It was clear she cared for Rin.

"Oh wow, questing?! Must be serious to let Rin go, who is she with?! Don't tell me you let Lime Sherbet and Cookie Dough take her somewhere. From what she said they're two brothers who really don't get along." Polly egged on and began to walk. Sesshomaru followed, putting on his sunglasses. Polly wore an 'The Airborne Toxic Event' T-shirt a band she recommended and he enjoyed.

Stark was incorrect in their assessment of 'depressing'.

"Indeed she accompanies them. The human… Strawberry is with her as well. They are gathering intelligence on a hostile party." Sesshoamru cracked his knuckles, allowing Polly to see them glow green. A prickling odd sensation invaded his gut referring to Romanoff in such a familiar way. Polly jerked her head back and whistled.

"Man, sounds like you've gotten yourself into some deep shit Mr. Mysterious. How's Chocolate doing? Still rescuing you like a damsel in distress?" Polly smiled cheekily and Sesshomaru frowned slightly 'He did seek me out when I was experiencing some, regrettably inconvenient emotional distress.' Stark's metal gloved caress on his shoulder disturbed him. He couldn't remember the last time he allowed anyone to touch him so. He didn't mind it, if he had he would have shaken loose of it. It confused him that he enjoyed it. But the fact that Stark touched him with his armor on proved that he didn't want to personally touch him.

Stark clearly didn't want him physically. He wanted Loki.

He could not blame Loki for this. Loki had never been much for monogamy and knew not of his...inclination towards Stark.

"My Lord is no woman and is rarely in distress! Rin exaggerated greatly my Lord's condition."
Jaken defended, and Polly held her hands up. Sesshomaru could see some of her markings much better now that her garment had no sleeves. She had many words written in script on her body, which he had used as a basis for practicing his writing. It had been strategically useful the night of the Star Wars viewing.

Sesshomaru had wondered if Stark also thought his handwriting to be aesthetically pleasing as the others did.

"That's why the word 'like' is in the sentence. Any moron can see he is a man. Well?" Polly fired back with lips painted purple. Sesshomaru at one time wished he could change his person as easily as Polly, or Loki could. He had wanted, long ago as a pup, to know what it would be like to have his father's markings, instead of his mother's.

"He lives. Chocolate has been studying my toxin for other uses." Polly's pierced eyebrows slanted a bit down and her jaw dropped. She pointed to him before another pedestrian walked between them.

"Mr. Mysterious, your friends have some really fucked up hobbies. Are they trying to make drugs with your goo? They're too weird." Polly's voice sounded concerned and Sesshomaru scoffed, eyes almost rolling under his sunglasses. Together, they managed to part most of the pedestrian traffic headed their way. One dog stopped stock still.

"The humans find 'me' peculiar. Especially Chocolate. I informed you of the shellfish." Sesshomaru admitted and Polly cracked up, her thin, pale frame shaking in laughter.
“Yeah if anyone brought me free blue crabs you best believe I wouldn’t knock ‘em for it. And how can someone who studies Demon toxin call anyone else weird?! Oh! How are Mint Chocolate Chip and Lime Sherbet going? They doin’ it yet?” Polly’s face lit up in mischief, much becoming of Loki, or rather, Lime Sherbet. She crossed her thin, marked arms in front of her, one of her markings was a large coi fish.

“They have not coupled yet. This Sesshomaru thinks Mint Chocolate Chip has a growing interest. Lime Sherbet bested him at a human game of colored spheres and poles.” Sesshomaru explained neutrally, but behind his aviators his eyes lit up in victory.

“Nicely done Mr. Matchmaker! Keep me up to date on you and Chocolate.” Sesshomaru whipped his head over to her as she shrugged, straightening out one of her many metal hoops on her ears.

“What!? You can’t think I haven’t picked up on it yet. You guys are at my shop on the daily for hours and all Rin does is draw you two together. Rin and I have already talked about it, especially when that model recruiter came in the shop.” Polly nudged Sesshomaru as they approached an intersection, waiting to cross.

“This Sesshomaru has no human friends.” Sesshomaru's voice low and dark, spat the word friends like a curse. Polly put her hands on her hips, taking out her communication device and thumbing through it, getting to a photo of one of Rin’s drawings.

“I'm wounded. See this? Rin said this actually happened. You got Chocolate to dress up just like you in traditional yukata and hakama. This picture, she said this is you at dinner with like, at least eight people at a fancy steakhouse. Oh, and also they're all listening to you give a power point presentation on war. Sounds like you guys are bomb friends. Besides, if you really hated them you wouldn't be bartering overpriced ice cream for them. And you would have taken Lime Sherbet and gotten out already.” She thumbed through the rest of the drawings on her communication device, Sesshomaru had made Rin make sure to not sketch Loki, as he typically looked, and to leave names off her pictures. Lady Potts explained that these humans were indeed special humans and to keep their identities hidden.

Sesshomaru shifted, hand twitching at Polly catching him off guard.

“I gave my word to him I would stay.” Sesshomaru heard himself admit and Polly rocked back in victory. He just then remembered upon returning with the crabs gave word to Stark that he would stay.

“Daaawww, see? ‘The Sundae’ is closer than you think it is. It’s a good thing, even though they all sound like insane drug lords.” Polly began to walk with the small crowd across the street, putting away her phone into the back pocket of her ripped jeans.

“Lord Sesshomaru doesn’t need the friendship of you humans!” Jaken protested, scrambling to catch up to their quick pace.

“Hey, have you ever thought that maybe Mr. Mysterious may want friends? Have you ever even asked him what he wants?” Polly challenged, glaring through smudged eyeliner at the little imp Demon.

“Lord Sesshomaru do you want to be friends with these humans?!” Jaken squawked shrilly and Polly put a hand to her face.

“…” Sesshomaru didn't respond, but he knew what he wanted. He wanted one human in particular, or at least, wanted an opportunity.
"Now you've made him all defensive. Nice Jaken." Polly stuck her tongue out at the Water Demon and lifted a ringed her middle finger to Jaken. Jaken, having no idea what the gesture meant, returned it.

"Me?! You imprudent girl! You were the one babbling about friendship and inclinations!" Jaken accused back and Sesshomaru let loose an exhale through his nose. Polly and Jaken were entirely too noisy.

"Ugh, this would be so much easier with Rin here. I am so outnumbered. Where are you meeting that Jason Sisson guy? I heard him roping you into drinks, I even put a reminder in my Google calendar. Good angle on making Chocolate jealous." Polly hopped over a pothole with her high, black laced shoes. On her legs was a green netted material.

"It is not your concern." Sesshomaru answered, ears lowering. Would such an act really render Stark jealous? Jealousy was the fear of someone taking something from them. Stark did not seem possessive in the least.

"Maaaaan. At least tell me about it after." Polly kicked air.

Sesshomaru promised nothing. This Jason Sisson would provide him knowledge of certain topics. Asking a commoner, he didn't care about of these topics would give him insight into how prepared this realm would be for war with minimal risk.

"Where are you taking us girl?!" Jaken demanded; Sesshomaru deep in thought about the new perspective Polly had given him. He concluded, that as an outsider, his interactions with the humans may seem more involved than they truly were. The humans and Thor saw him as an ally only. He considered Loki a friend, not that he would admit it out loud. After his conversation with Stark, he resolved to not have his scry cloud his judgment.

He doubted Stark had an inclination for him beyond an alliance. He had stated he carried on and coupled with many human females, not males.

"I told you, Soho. My family knows some whacko who collects Japanese stuff. If what you guys have is legit, he will pay big money for it. Way too many rich people in this city thinking they can buy culture." Polly informed with a hint of spite.

"Of course what Lord Sesshomaru has is legitimate. He is no thief nor fraud!" Jaken protested vehemently and Polly shrugged her body, tattooed shoulders.

"Just sayin'. My dad says this is an old family friend, but when the economic crash hit and my rents almost lost everything, did he chip in to help? Nope. Like I said Mr. Mysterious, despite what others may say, I don't think Demons are evil. I mean, what kind of evil Demon brings his adopted human daughter to a rundown ice cream shack all day just because? Greed, man. Greed is what's evil." Polly scowled bitterly. Sesshomaru turned to her. He had not given this human any reason to think of him as decent.

"Your ice cream market was the only one not teeming with screeching human children." Sesshomaru imputed and Polly whistled in agreement.

"True, it's all about the Pinkberry to those nut-job parents...oh we're here." Polly pointed to the building. They approached hesitant door guard. Almost assuredly they were a curious sight but Polly held out her communication device to him, saying that they were messaged by the owner of the penthouse. They were allowed to enter and ascended immediately to the penthouse floor. They exited and were immediately brought to an ornate door. She knocked harshly.
“Ah good to see you Miss Tanaka. I see here you have Mr. Sesshomaru and his business partner Jaken?” An overweight man opened the door, revealing an opulent, warm living quarters. He appeared harmless, much like many of the humans of this time.

“Yeah, nice to see you too Mr. Peterson. Look, we are on a time crunch, let’s get this started.” Polly didn’t sound particularly happy to be in this person’s presence. Sesshomaru noted to compensate her grandly.

"Of course." He led them in and Sesshomaru took off his sunglasses. He looked into the eyes of the meek, soft man.

"Pffft, you young kids and your crazy costumes, hair color, and tattoos. I suppose whatever suits your fancy, now for business. Polly said you had antique Koban coins.” The man chuckled to himself, Sesshomaru ignored his comment about his appearance and turned to Jaken. Again, good fortune Jaken had their tribute bullion on their person and not on Ah-Un when the magic gate appeared.

Jaken took out a large pouch secreted on his lower back, and deftly produced an oblong, imprinted gold coin from them. The human’s eyes bulged wide out of his head.

“This…this is an original Keicho Koban! How did you come by this? It is in mint condition! Ahem, I mean, I don’t see a signed appraisal, but since I am an appraiser myself I suppose I can take a look." Neither Sesshomaru, Jaken, nor Polly knew what he babbled about. Sesshomaru used these coins rarely, they were more for visiting other Lord’s lands as a gift not for everyday trade.

"If you are willing to part with this, I shall take the off your hands from you for $55,500. A good deal really, for you." Sesshomaru knew not of the amount he was getting for these coins. He only required sufficient currency to purchase a communication device, pay for his meal tonight with that over-eager human, Sisson, and to repay Lady Potts for her hospitality.

"No way. Your friggin' eyes bulged out of your head like you did when you saw my grandma’s old kimono. If you want it so bad, $70,000, and that’s the family discount.” Polly crossed her arms and the man frowned, clearly not expecting a negotiation.

After ten minutes, and the human waddling to his safe, they came out $65,000.00 richer. They left in haste and only when they stood outside of the building did Polly finally jump and laugh hysterically.

“Oh my fucking god! You really are some Demon Lord from the past! I can’t believe that. I mean, I've negotiated commissions on my tattoos before but never li—" Polly's eyes grew wide as saucers as Sesshomaru placed $10,500.00 in her hand. Her jaw dropped. "You can't give me this. You don't even know how much money you really have do you!?” Polly pushed it back and Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes.

“This Sesshomaru is your business partner. I reciprocated what I feel equal to your services, assistance, and human sweets.” Sesshomaru's gaze gave no room for negotiation.

“Yeah but you—" Sesshomaru cut her off again.

"Do not disrespect this Sesshomaru.” He warned and she promptly took the money and shoved it in her purse awkwardly looking around. He smelled her nervousness as she fidgeted with her bracelets.

"Well, thanks. Thanks a lot, honestly Sesshomaru. You really don't know how much this means to
me... or my family. Is there anything else I can help you with while we're out?" Polly stammered numbly, not really fully processing what happened.

"This Sesshomaru desires a communication device, and a garment with Nirvana depicted on it. Jaken informed me that it is custom to wear such things in this realm." Sesshomaru put on his sunglasses and looked out into the street. If he were to be here in this realm, he would blend in to avoid further attentions to his person.

"Yeah, I can definitely help with that. Let me guess, you only want one in white or red white? I haven't seen you wear anything else." Polly joked, her voice finally starting to sound like her own after coming down from shock.

"Lord Sesshomaru wears red and white to represent his Lordship of the Western Lands!" Jaken sputtered, puffing out his chest wide.

"Yeah, well, I got your back. First stop, cellphone. Next your t-shirt and shopping for your hot date with that Sisson guy tonight. You'll be so hot, 'Chocolate' will melt in your hand." Polly winked and practically skipped, lips curled in a bright smile down fifth avenue. Sesshomaru fought satisfaction at seeing her cheerful disposition.

Ping.

The barrier resounded.

An airborne enemy was fast approaching, the barrier alerted him before even he heard the vessel. Bakusaiga and Tenseiga both pulsed, one in anticipation, one in warning. He and Jaken were in what he learned was called Central Park, at the location of Bethesda fountain plaza.

Humans continued to mill about in the park unaware of the eminent threat. In this location, due to it being out in the open, he could fight easier than in the city with its tall structures and narrow pathways.

"Lord Sesshomaru, you felt that correct? Something evil approaches!" Jaken jumped wearing a new AC/DC shirt and holding a bulky shopping bag. Sesshomaru continued to walk calmly to the fountain in the center of the plaza.

"Yes, be wary Jaken." Sesshomaru had Tenseiga and Bakusaiga in their proper drafting paper tubes and was dressed in his new human clothing. Including his favored aviators. He had never fought in his new attire, but did not think it would be much of an issue other than slightly confining.

He heard the shrieking engines of the sleek ship, different than the one he flew to New York in and much larger. He turned North to see the ship approach the park and the humans began to scream.

Sesshomaru was thankful for Stark's 'hear-aints' devices.

He watched as smaller vessels departed the larger one and headed straight towards him in a sloppy attack formation.

'Odd. Can they sense me? Do they pursue me? It saves me time, them coming to me to slay them.' Sesshomaru readied himself and made note that the humans in the park were either fleeing or holding their cellphones up to the sky, Polly taught him the proper term of the communication device yesterday.

Sesshomaru stood by the fountain and pulsed his youki, causing all the water to displace and shoot
out in a sloshing wave, soaking Jaken, who managed to keep the shopping bag dry.

Jaken was protesting as he cracked his knuckles and the toxin dripped forth, hissing onto the stone. Sesshomaru remained impassive as the dozen small ships approached him, all smaller than the taxi Loki once tricked him into.

Vehicles, never again.

Sesshomaru readied his whip and when they opened fire he leapt into the air, and with a swirling flourish he intercepted the blue projectiles, reflecting them back at the manned vessels. They meteored down, afire, his foes screaming in the flames.

He landed with grace and three of the ships landed, each with three creatures on them.

'These must be the Chitauri that Loki mentioned. Ugly, tactless creatures.' Sesshomaru regarded them with disdain as one approached.

"We have been ordered by our Dark Lord to apprehend you Sesshomaru, Demon Eternal, or the Godling Broken Blade, whoever you are, and return you. You will come willingly or not." The leader snarled, holding what looked like a chain and harness of some sort.

Sesshomaru revealed no expression at being recognized, though he was perplexed. He had no idea how they knew who he was, and how they sensed him. His existence in this time should not be known by them. He also had no idea how they knew Loki had shape-shifted into his own form.

Loki's presence out of the Asgardian prison was also a closely guarded secret.

The other ships then surrounded him, the fountain, and Jaken. They were caught in the center. The Chitauri surrounded him, three dozen in all.

"...I think not. Artless creatures." Sesshomaru pooled out his toxin whip and began to spin, his whip spiraling out and gyrating around him like a galaxy. Upon the height of it's speed, the revolving flashes of the whip lashed out, cutting the Chitauri down brutally. Sprays of purple blood and ribbons of entrails ringed the pavilion like a painting.

Two remained. One fired a ray at him, similar to the bullets. His youki flashed red, and rebuffed the ray and charged the offending Chitauri.

"You will fall, you abomination! You Celestial experimen—" Sesshomaru cut him off by decapitating him with his talons. Sesshomaru clutched the sticky, ugly head by the oozing neck vertebrae. He threw the severed head at the other Chitauri, disarming him of his ray device. Then he flashed to him, fisting his talons through his gut, eviscerating him.

While flicking the blood and viscera from his talons, some of the humans began to cheer, others began to cry. Many still held up their cellphones.

He side stepped from an encroaching blood puddle.

'Why they did not have to hold sense to escape is beyond me. Stupid, curious humans. Foolish Loki for getting me involved in such tiresome predicaments.' Sesshomaru heard many more of the smaller vessels approaching, at an accelerated pace.

This time, more ships glided from the larger vessel, they dotted the sky like a swarm of Naraku's poisonous insects. Sesshomaru had had enough. From the tube, he withdrew Bakusaiga, who chirped in delight.
It was then he heard a familiar roar. The Berserker. He had no time for this.

Humans screamed and scattered in all directions as the Berserker crashed through the park, cratering soil, splintering trees and leveling stands. Some of the humans even ran towards him as if he were some sort of personal protector. Sesshomaru's ears lowered.

'So even still the Berserker has limited control over his true form. He is truly as bad as Inuyasha.' Sesshomaru lifted his chin loftily.

Sesshomaru determined he would not interfere with the Berserker unless he directly intervened in his affairs. Gripping Bakusaiga tightly he jumped onto the top of the fountain pointing Bakusaiga at the oncoming attacking squadron.

Bakusaiga buzzed with verdant green lightning and twisting flames.

He leapt high into the sky, the clipping sound of a hovering human ship sounded to his south east. Bakusaiga sparked in glee, over-eager to taste the blood of their foolish challengers.

He was about to allow Bakusaiga the devastation she craved when he heard a familiar, mechanical sound, North of his location. The unique propulsion system of a certain red and gold suit.

Stark was in the fray!

Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed as he powered down Bakusaiga, he saw some of the ships fall on the left-most flank but the rest ignored them, still aiming towards Sesshomaru. Out of his peripheral vision he saw Jaken hide in the drained fountain from the disoriented Berserker who was smashing a two-wheeled vehicle.

Sesshomaru gauged the distance between Stark on the left and the incoming right flank of about fifty ships. He ratcheted up Bakusaiga's flaming youki again. With a snap of energy Bakusaiga fired off a perfect beam of decomposition energy at the right flank of the squadron.

The column of energy reverberated and engulfed the ships and shot out past them into the atmosphere. The after effects of the beam smoldered in the air for a moment before disappearing entirely.

They never stood a chance.

The Berserker, seeing the display of power then rushed the fountain when he landed. His blood draining roar chilled Jaken and a small girl who had gotten left behind in the rush. Sesshomaru's eyes widened a fraction. She had black hair.

Sesshomaru, reluctantly, gathered his ice blue youki and pulsed it out towards the Berserker like a wave of water.

"Behave Berserker. This Sesshomaru is busy." Sesshomaru's pupils sharpened and he cracked his knuckles.

The Berserker ceased his advance and Sesshomaru swore he saw recognition in his dark eyes.

'Thrice I have reprimanded this Berserker, perhaps next time he will not require my aid.' Sesshomaru hoped, and remembered in his scry the Berserker seemed focused. The Berserker may have hope yet to control his true form, unlike Inuyasha.

It was then the other ships converged and opened fire. Many also landed, the Chitauri scrambling
off their crafts with similar shackles. He bounded high in the air, and with his left hand, uncoiled his whip and fully extended it, twisting to eliminate or reflect back all the incoming projectiles. He destroyed most.

Not all.

Not the one that flew harmlessly past him, towards Jaken and the girl.

'I won't get to them in time. I should have told Jaken to get back.' Sesshomaru's eyes widened and his ears pricked up in alarm.

It was then he saw the Berserker fling his mass in front of them, shielding them from the explosion with his massive, muscled frame.

Sesshomaru's ears lowered as the Berserker's smoldering body turned towards him. Sesshomaru nodded in thanks, and the Berserker grunted. The girl fled, crying.

'The Berserker is learning. This is fortunate. Now, to the matter at hand.' Sesshomaru's eyes sharpened as the squadron drew in close.

He eyed the Berserker and the Berserker, cognizant, eyed him back. Sesshomaru jutted his chin over and the Hulk rampaged forth, battering away the Chitauri on the ground as if made of rice paper. Sesshomaru's eyes widened when he saw the Berserker take one of the Chitauri and throw him through the air, becoming a pinprick in the distance. The Berserker then picked up one of the crafts and started beating the standing Chitauri with it, smashing them into the stone.

'I see, his strength, perhaps, is a touch impressive.' Sesshomaru amended his first impression of the Berserker. Joining the fray, he sliced through the Chitauri with Bakusaiga with swift, allayed strokes, careful not to use more decomposition energy than necessary to dispose of them. He and the Berserker finished off the last of their ground troops with Sesshomaru beheading another Chitauri, watching his body and severed head decay into dust.

Stark then showed up, suit blazing red in the bright blue sky.

"I wasn't kidding about the name tag with my address on it." Sesshomaru ignored him. "Think you can do another light show like that, Daft Punk?" Sesshomaru gripped Bakusaiga tighter at the strange name.

"If you stay out of my way, yes." Sesshomaru allowed a small smirk.

"Just watch for Legolas and Capsicle they're picking some of th-Wait, are you wearing a Nirvana Serve the Servants T-shirt?!" Stark's voice raised half an octave and Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow.

'I cannot discern if this human is indeed insane or purposely antagonizes this Sesshomaru.' Sesshomaru's ears twitched, wishing he could see Stark's face to gauge his emotions.

"You ask this Sesshomaru about garments mid-battle?" Sesshomaru slowly deadpanned. Stark laughed.

"Yeah, I've never been one for good timing. I'm impressed after the Star Wars movie that you've officially gone full hipster." Tony fired a supercharged repulsor blast at an approaching vessel, obliterating it.

Sesshomaru immediately sensed his own youki from the suit. However now was not the time to
inspect how a human managed to harness his own youki and use it offensively. Stark once more fired an explosive projectile at a Chitauri.

The Chitauri dodged and with a chattering of a spell Sesshomaru did not catch, the manacles he held glowed violet. As quick as any tentacle from Naraku, the manacles shot out and latched themselves onto Sesshomaru's wrists. A sharp sting of pain lanced up from his wrists, his eyes went wide. The magicked chains pitched down, impossibly heavy, to force him to the ground. He lurched forward and gritted his fangs in an attempt to resist the pull.

"Hey! Don't touch my stuff." Stark shouted instantly and from his armor's wrist a red laser beam severed the chains and the Chitauri before it could revel in its victory.

"My stuff?" Sesshomaru's ears lowered. Stark...possessive?


'Gorgeous? Does Stark desire me?' Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side and Tenseiga hummed contentedly.

"...I do not sulk...I shall employ Bakusaiga on the smaller vessels. After I will lure the flagship away from the metropolis and destroy it over the harbor." Sesshomaru replied calmly and pointed Bakusaiga towards the most densely packed section of the squadron.

"Just focus Backstreet boy on the Chitauri chariots. SHIELD is scrambling their helicarriers so you shouldn't have to worry about taking out Piett's star destroyer." Stark responded as the Berserker flung himself into the air, grabbing two vessels from the sky and slamming them to the ground, kicking up dirt.

"This Sesshomaru allows no one to take his kill." Sesshomaru's tone left no argument as he pointed an incandescent Bakusaiga towards the enemy once more. Bakusaiga's green energy ignited into a flame. Stark, who was still firing on some of the outliers, made sure he was clear of the blast when he leapt and discharged the beam of corrosive green youki.

It shot straight and true through the heart of the progressing vessels, disintegrating most of them.

"Ok, no playing with that toy in the house." Stark joked, admiring the destruction. Sesshomaru landed softly. However, more poured out of the flagship. An endless swarm like Naraku's insects indeed.

"Disgusting human. Bakusaiga is no plaything, she is the most powerful weapon in existence!" Jaken shouted, hopping out of the drained fountain and standing next to the Berserker.

"Go play in traffic, Frogger." Tony retorted.

"Jaken remain here." Sesshomaru looked down at his loyal retainer, appraising his wet, though unharmed condition. He was also relieved that his garments in Jaken's care stayed dry.

"It's like you have a bone, Lassie. Just wait for SHIELD, they shou-" Stark narrowly dodged an incoming projectile, striking the ground near the Berserker. Barton and Rogers came running to meet them. The Berserker pounded his massive fists.

"Hey, they're all headed this direction, was that all you with that Death Star cannon? That was clutch...are you wearing a Nirvana T-shirt?" Barton began and without looking, fired an arrow
hitting an incoming ship dead center.

"Yes. I am departing to lure the main vessel away." Sesshomaru responded simply, tossing his hair.

"Don't engage it. You don't know the payload of fire-power it has!" Stark protested. Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes in annoyance.

"Do not presume to order me about nor underestimate me." Sesshomaru's voice iced out, pulsing his youki. His thoughts flashed to the other night, seeing Loki straddling Stark on the floor of his bedchambers.

'He sees me as weak! He saw my injuries when Loki engaged me and poisoned me three nights prior. He thinks I am easily overtaken and ambushed! Perhaps that is why he sought out Loki's company that evening on the floor of his quarters. He thinks I am some unworthy weakling needing protection!' Sesshomaru suddenly saw red.

"Hey, who is new to this century again? I'm not underestimating you, I used to make weapons for a living, trust me this thing could pack some serious extra-terrestrial heat." Stark insisted, voice tight.

'A lie. First the Berserker underestimates my intelligence with the strategy, now Stark with my strength. How dare Stark underestimate this Sesshomaru after witnessing me dispatch most of their fleet! Does he think I am simply lucky?' Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles, youki spiking.

"I agree with Sesshomaru, Tony." Rogers turned to Sesshomaru. "If you can get the ship away from the city that would minimize casualties. SHIELD can take it out with the helicarriers more easily over water and they're only about four minutes out. We will clean up the rest of the ships and other Chitauri that have landed." Rogers explained. Sesshomaru did not bother to correct him that he would take out the cruiser, not their helicarriers. He turned, ignoring Stark's cursing.

With a mighty leap, Sesshomaru jettisoned into the air, bounding South through the rest of the park and along sky scrapers. He had one destination in mind, the large green statue. He would kite their flagship over water and sink her.

Chariots whirred and screamed behind him, chasing him as he bounded towards the harbor.

Brandishing Bakusaiga, she pulsed in unadulterated delight as he twisted back and cleaved in half three of the Chitauri. With a flick of a wrist he also carved the offending chariot in two.

The Chitauri's bodies began to eat away and a bolt of magical energy came straight forwards him. He backhanded it away with his left hand. It stung and burned more than he cared to admit.

Eyes hard and markings dancing in rage, he rebounded. He left an after-image and dispatched two more chariots before unleashing another shot of Bakusaiga's brutality down the street littered with the pests.

'What disorganized creatures. Even Huto's army was better commanded.' Sesshomaru took advantage of the enemy's disarray and whipped around, his long silver hair a blur.

"Die." The spiraling torrent of youki that pulsed forth from Bakusaiga avoided all nearby structures and flooded out like water. The corrosive force illuminated the bright, clear sunny day too brightly to stare at. Sesshomaru didn't linger to inspect the damage.

Dashing over buildings and using his full speed, he vaulted from a tall building onto a large barge in the water. He barely tapped his foot down before setting off again for his target, the torch of the statue.
He turned and allowed himself a small lift of lips when indeed the largest ship finally gave chase. The wind whipping his long silver hair as he awaited the challenge on the metal flame. Bakusaiga sparked green and glowed softly in anticipation.

She had one last attack left in her.

'These beings meant to capture Loki or myself. Those chains were enchanted to bind us both, but for what desire or purpose? And why did they think I could be Loki? I quieted Tenseiga after learning it was he who produced his magic, so it cannot be Tenseiga.' Sesshomaru frowned surging his youki from its docile blue to hostile red around him. It swirled and spiked around him.

The ship accelerated, as if accepting Sesshomaru's challenge, and Sesshomaru waited for the opportune moment.

Two doors underneath the ship opened to extend two cannons on either side. Immediately they charged up, glowing hot and gold. Sesshomaru knew he had a small window of time to act.

Too soon and the ship would fall onto the city, too late and he left himself vulnerable to the ship's defenses.

Off to his left he heard the chopping sound of a human vessel hovering. It sounded too small to be those helicarriers Stark and Rogers referenced.

'It is time Bakusaiga, to show our ourselves. It is a matter of pride.' Sesshomaru reeled in and gathered in youki, concentrating it. He pointed Bakusaiga towards the ship, now in attack position. He expected the cannons to fire right then, however, something far more mysterious occurred. Doors opened up like a mouth from the top of the ship.

Immediately his senses spiked and tingled.

Youki.

Warped and weakened, but youki. Nostalgia and excitement flurried through his red youki.

A stream of shadowed, star spangled youki coiled up and out of the door, hovering above the ship. The dragon spirit had a fanged mouth, ruby red eyes, and a white noh mask he knew too well.

He knew this Demon spirit, this soul from the Demon Underworld.

Ryukotsusei.

Sesshomaru forced his zig-zagging Demon Blood to calm in his veins. Why was his father's slayer here?

"So, first the bastard, now the heir. The eldest son of Inu no Taisho lives indeed. How fortunate for me." Sesshomaru didn't hear his voice, it instead echoed in his head.


"The same could be said of you, Lord Sesshomaru! I have orders to capture you, the Eternal...or your friend, the Broken Blade. Yet, that voice is far, too far away. Instead, I implore you to free me. I was not meant for this station." Ryukotsusei rambled, disoriented.

Sesshomaru scoffed and Bakusaiga giggled in euphoria as the ship's cannons began to alight in
clustered spheres of gold energy.

"Kneel then." Sesshomaru supplemented his red youki with Bakusaiga's energy beam. The snapping red lightning infused the green ray and with a peal of static noise, it struck the bow of the ship. The initial explosion sparked a chain reaction through its hull.

Bakusaiga slumbered, spent of energy. He quickly sheathed her. He had fought these specters before.

He withdrew Tenseiga and cleaved through the air in front of him. A slice of blue youki hit the Dragon's Spirit right on, evaporating him and a sigh echoed.

Then the cannons finally fired.

One fired wide left into the sea creating a tremendous blowout of salt water. The second came straight on.

Sesshomaru concentrated and flared out his red youki before the cannon blast hit. The youki wall met with the blazing stream with a scraping, jolting buzz. He ground his fangs as his shoes dented the metal flame underneath him due to the pressure.

The immense saffron burst was eroding his youki wall! Sesshomaru winced. He would not, could not be defeated here. He had never come across a force like this before.

Tenseiga pulsed. No.

He didn't need Tenseiga's protection. He didn't need anyone's protection but his own.

'I will not back down here. I am to prove to Stark and the rest of these Avengers what I am truly capable of. I am the Lord of the Western Lands and this technology will bend to me, not the other way around!' Sesshomaru's eyes bled fully red and his markings morphed into jagged lines, the ones on his wrists turned crimson as he struggled to repel the cannon blast.

Sesshomaru, with one final, feral growl, gushed his scarlet youki out.

Like a clawed hand, his scarlet youki jolted through the air between him and the deadly shot. His red youki webbed out around the golden cannon blast, ensconcing it and with a muffled boom, imploded it.

It was done.

'Ryukotsusei. How could he be here? Why was he working for this Titan Warlord? What did he mean by Eternal?' Sesshomaru sheathed Tenseiga, standing tall on the flame. It didn't matter right now. Now, what mattered was that Stark had witnessed his true might. Perhaps he would reconsider romping about with Loki.

Sesshomaru flipped his aviator sunglasses back on as the sleek, black ship plummeted from the sky as a smoldering heap into the choppy harbor.

Chapter End Notes

The plot thickens!!!!
I have officially edited chapters 1 and 2 if you are interested. In my opinion they have been greatly improved.

thanks again for reading :)

-TL
Tony and the Anomaly

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony and the Anomaly

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"Dum-e, hold it steady or I'll have Fury mount you as the figurehead on one of the Helicarriers." Tony chirped as Dum-e held up a blow torch. Dum-e whined and Tony rolled his eyes. He was almost done.

Tony Stark used to make weapons for a living. All sorts of weapons, big, small, semi-automatic, auto-targeting, incendiary, explosive, heat seeking, tactical, aircraft, anti-aircraft, nuclear, you name it. Tony Stark knew weapons. He helped write the book on being an arms dealer, merchant, savant, whatever.

So, Tony Stark knew a weapon when he saw one. He knew Sesshomaru, the reserved Dog Demon he was, had tricks up his sleeve and held back. He was waiting for the intimidating Demon Lord to show them how he really threw down.

Tony wasn't a very patient person, if he didn't see more out of the Demon Lord soon he was going to provoke him with his new and improved 'youki blasters'. Nothing like taking a dose of your own medicine, especially after causing him so much grief.

Yet, he didn't expect his display of power to be against an alien attack cruiser that was two months ahead of schedule. Tony couldn't get a cocktail made on time at one of his own functions, but an alien invasion, that made sense. Early even.

When the ship descended upon New York, Jarvis immediately alerted him and his blood ran icy. When he had his chat with Loki three years ago in Stark Tower, he said that the invasion was on him. That even if the Chitauri were to come and reap the Earth, that it was on Loki. He and the rest of the Avengers would avenge the Earth.

This time around though, was different. It was on all of them.

Especially on him.

He made the decision to not turn Loki into SHIELD when he appeared on his balcony. He decided to not kill Sesshomaru when he had passed out after his 'scrynado'. He, Tony Stark, unintentionally had taken responsibility, even if for selfish, mostly curious reasons. 'Responsibility' plus 'Tony Stark' was supposed to equal 'not in this lifetime'.

But then he had to go and sign up with Fury's super secret boy band.

He couldn't pay Pepper to do this. He couldn't pay Pepper to get rid of everyone who was inhabiting his house, his tower. Blowing up his microwaves, drinking his coffee, using his kitchen, queuing up terrible movies to his Tivo. He couldn't tell everyone to buzz off and stop acting like a weirdly comfortable family.

Before, his family was Dum-e, Jarvis, and on occasion when he wasn't being particularly anti-social, Pepper, and Rhodey. Now, well, now he was not only entertaining, not only harboring, but
full out getting used to them being in his tower.

And, the past two days, and an encore of presentation of the blue man group told him he wasn't quite sure how to handle it. If he could handle it. It didn't escape Tony that it took the event of having four of the 'ice cream party' missing to how uneasy and unbalanced everything became.

It made his stomach churn.

Because, after the four of them left, everything frayed at the edges. Sesshomaru left like he had more important places to be. He hated being left, but he did promise him he would stick around, so Tony grumbled, drank more of his 'overpriced but totally worth it' coffee and stuck to his work.

Clint mostly tensely paced around from room to room, which only phased Tony because he knew Clint was usually was perfectly fine being alone. Cap made everything worse to Tony by pointing out that yes, the com he gave to Nat would most likely not work, and Steve proclaimed it would be on himself if she didn't come back with all spidey-senses tingling.

'No Steve. It isn't on you. It's actually, mostly on me. Yes, you're the lead singer for Fury's 'SHIELD's Got Talent' squad, but this isn't your tower, you aren't funding SHIELD, you didn't have to make the call about Loki, about Sailor Moon, risk having your best friend shun you over having an 'enemy of the state' squatting in substorage room 3-b. Your arc reactor isn't harmonizing with a Demon Lord.' Tony ran a finger around the outside of his arc reactor absently.

Bruce kept up with him in the lab, to Tony's relief, but he mostly thought it was also to keep him from binge-drinking. Bruce was good company and all, but he didn't keep the rakes of anxiety scratching his mind at bay.

He also hadn't slept the past two nights, how could he? He had to prep, he had to get the proximity barrier fully up and running. He had the toxins to perfect. He had to get everything ready, if no one else was.

He had to be on his A-game especially with Thor and Loki still having tea and biscuits with Allfather and friends, Steve and Clint having a boy scout field trip at a baseball game, and Sesshomaru wandering around AWOL. Sesshomaru was probably going on a romantic stroll with that loser he caught him with last night.

Not that he was spying on the Demon Lord. Loki did tell him to make sure he didn't scry, it was preventative maintenance.

Obviously, he tracked Sailor Moon as he went all over Soho with Toady in tow. Ultimately when he back to that Steakhouse on 9th street Tony decided to investigate. Tony's mind overheated in an attempt to rectify how he managed to barter for that Armani crimson silk shirt, unbuttoned to show far too much of his throat and chest, and those charcoal pants that made his legs look runway long.

But he wasn't wearing the outfit for him, and he didn't return to Stark Tower that night either.

That didn't sit well with Tony. Just who did this new guy think he was? He probably didn't know anything about Sailor Moon, especially that he wasn't even human, and that his species ate humans. Like a guy like that could handle who he really was.

Tony was prepared to drag Sailor Moon back to Stark Tower by his hair if he didn't return by tonight.

But of course, as his life would have it, Sailor Moon was quite literally a mayhem magnet because an alien battleship appeared and what did he know?! The ship actually chased him!
Tony knew once the ship didn't accelerate towards anything nor open fire indiscriminately that it had an intended target, as most weapons do.

And if the intended target wasn't Stark Tower, Tony made a wild guess that the ship's target had to be single most destructive force in his life: the Demon Lord. Tony, per usual, was right of course.

He was thankful Clint wanted to get off a stop early from the Iron Man Express. He wasn't about to let Sesshomaru face down an unknown alien death ship with swarms of Chitauri alone especially after the whole 'Tony Stark attempts comfort' speech he gave him.

But, turns out, he didn't have to make a bee-line after all.

Because, while you can piss in his suits, as he once showed at a party, he didn't like to make a habit of it. Yet, when he saw the giant green death-ray incinerate over fifty of those Chitauri flying scooters, a little bit may have come out.

It jellied his bones and caused every warning bell and whistle alarm in his suit to sound. Jarvis jabbered in his ear like Armageddon had arrived. He had never seen anything like it, it was terrifying, and humbling. He wondered if the victims of his weapons hearts thudded like his did when he saw the incomprehensibly powerful torrent of green energy surge past him.

For a split second, all rational thought of trajectory, direction and logic went out the window as Tony Stark, Iron Man and one of 'Earth's Mightiest Heroes', was too late to save New York, and a certain lost dog of his.

His arc reactor jolted him back to reality when it lit up like Steve's eyes when he talks about teamwork. Jarvis reported his arc reactor had a positive relationship with the energy. Instantly, Tony got it.

That blast came from Sailor Moon, not the other way around.

'Destructive force in my life, again right on target. Sailor Moon may be in the lightweight weight class, physically, but he doesn't fight like one.' Tony thought Thor had a mean swing. This is who they had mouthed off to in the desert of New Mexico. Tony really should have known better.

They really could have used him three years ago.

Tony wondered just how much Loki knew about his best friend's power he really knew about. Loki, when they learned about Sailor Moon's past admitted he didn't know exactly what he was capable of.

Tony, along with Natasha figured that Sesshomaru hadn't used his swords: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern...NSync and Backstreet boy, whatever, for a reason. Tony also figured that they weren't ordinary swords, belonging to a Demon Lord and all. But, he made that one sword of his sound like a surly teenage girl, not the imperial Death Star.

Tony couldn't envision a more efficient weapon, and he thought SHIELD would realize the same thing.

Tony, however, knew that just because you got a big gun doesn't mean someone else doesn't have a bigger one. That was what the Cold War was all about, the Arms Race. Nuclear Deterrents. Who can blow each other up more, not who can just blow something up.

Again, he knew weapons. So, when Sesshomaru wanted to take off to be bait for a battleship of unknown firepower he had a problem with it. No one else seemed to, but they didn't see things the
way Tony did. They weren't as smart as he was, and well, Tony couldn't really fault them for that.

Well, Bruce was up there, but Bruce was currently the Green Machine and didn't have a whole lot to say besides grunting.

Because, he was one guy versus a ship; one false move and you're Swiss cheese, or a smear on a wall. Ask that tank guy from Tianamen square. Oh, wait, you can't.

He began to understand Loki's frustration Sesshomaru's recklessness...and the last thing Tony needed for his sanity was to understand Loki's rationale for anything.

'Like I said literal mayhem magnet, and I'm harmonizing with him!' Tony grumbled, hunched over his workshop counter, trying, in vain, to quell his anger.

He still let Steve have it for giving the green light to the stupidest game of playing hard to get ever. Just because Sesshomaru wasn't an Avenger didn't mean you could just whore him out to do your dirty work. Sailor Moon even said he didn't do dirty work, but here he was, drawing a deadly spaceship away from a densely populated city to safety. He didn't even have a good reason to, it was obvious to Tony Sailor Moon hated New York City.

Tony almost expected him to let the ship fall to get rid of some of the 'moronic humans' but that was definitely more Loki's deal.

'Yet, he took on a fucking space battle cruiser, blew it up, suppressed its payload without a scratch on him. All from on top of the Statue of Liberty like he wasn't showing off enough. 'Sho is a total 'sho' off.' Tony rolled his eyes.

All five of them, Jaken included, held their breath when they saw Sesshomaru's red youki almost get snuffed out by the ship's attack. Tony didn't have a pulse until he saw Sesshomaru retaliate and implode it successfully.

Tony usually liked being right, but he didn't want to be right with a dead Demon Lord, a pissed-off Loki, and a crying little girl.

Tony, when his pulse returned, didn't dare to philosophize whether or not he worried over the Demon Lord. Tony Stark didn't do 'worry'. Clearly his arc reactor was going all 'rogue-omaru' on him. Also, he had to admit if Statue of Liberty was blown to hell it wouldn't be good for anyone's morale.

However, it would be wrong for Tony Stark, former merchant of death, to say he underestimated Sesshomaru. He didn't. How could he? He just saw the guy obliterate almost a whole battalion of Chitauri wearing a Nirvana T-shirt and aviators.

Plus, the whole slicing and dicing on the way out of New York was brilliant.

Tony just didn't like underestimating an enemy, and if he got killed Rin would cry and Pepper, and Reindeer Games would probably blame him.

'Speaking of Pepper, she should be getting here in a few hours. I was good this time and told her what was happening when I left Stark Tower. She can't be that mad.' Tony reasoned rubbing the back of his neck. 'Well, too mad.' Tony corrected as he finished repairing one of the repulsor gauntlets that got damaged in the fight in the park.

The hours following the attack were long and obnoxious. Tony had a lot to say to the sulky Demon, but he opted instead to cool off and do repairs. He wasn't the only one who wanted to talk
to him though. Fury called him approximately four hundred times to talk to Sailor Moon and each time he redirected the call.

Instead, Fury blew up Clint's phone demanding to know where Natasha was. That went over well. Fury obviously didn't like Clint's snarky answer of 'she's studying abroad', and Clint shouted into the phone for a good forty seconds. Fury was pissed and on his way over to Stark Tower in a few hours after wrapping up E.T.'s playhouse in the bay.

'Cool your jets cyclops. I get it, you're pissed, I'm pissed too. It's just a big fucking pissing match. Let's arm wrestle over it. It's not like you even did anything this go around.' Tony scowled, the nerve of that entitled asshole. Clint already seemed on edge and in a general bad mood. Tony didn't usually notice those types of things, but he had seen Clint literally staring at a turned off TV. Fury blowing his top over something Clint couldn't control didn't sit well with the inventor.

Another reason Tony didn't trust SHIELD. If that's how they treated their most dedicated people, he sure as hell didn't want to see how SHIELD treated that Galaga player he called out. Or to see them get their hands into his tech, especially Sirius and Cerberus he and Bruce perfected.

Bruce was moping somewhere, totally overreacting to his recent 'hulkburst.' All the did was bust up a motorcycle and scare some kids. He even apparently saved Toady and a little girl, then threw a Chitauri all the way to Queens. Tony knew Bruce could be hard on himself, so he didn't say anything. But still, guy has got to cut himself a little slack.

Steve was talking to Agent Hill about the Chitauri, the invasion, and how to proceed from here. Agent Hill looked about as approachable as a box of snakes.

'Good luck with that Steve, like any of us, maybe save Reindeer Games, know what the hell is happening. Hopefully the 'scamtastic four' come back soon so we can actually talk strategy. Seriously. We have to rely on Loki. This has disaster written all over it.' Tony shrugged to himself, finally leaving his workshop, fixing up his suit from the minimal damage it too during the fight.

So far they didn't tell SHIELD anything about Loki, but it was only a matter of time before they came back from Asgard and the shitstorm really picked up speed.

Luckily, there was only one ship, not a whole fleet. No signs that the whole armada was gonna bust down their gates while two of their players and Reindeer Games were in the penalty box.

Everyone, including Agent Hill, was avoiding the elephant (dog?) in the room, Sesshomaru. Fury wasn't the slightest bit grateful that Sesshomaru probably saved countless lives, which irked Tony. Even though Sesshomaru took matters in his own hands, Tony had to admit that the calculated explosive force of the ship's cannons would have shredded through the helicarrier's armor. Along with the enemy ship's maneuverability it could have easily taken out one or two of the helicarriers.

'Maybe it would have been worth it if Fury was on board a helicarrier. Nah, he'd survive just to spite me." Tony snuck out of his workshop, trying his best to avoid everyone.

In short, it would have taken a lot longer to deal with the ship on their own without Sailor Moon's help. Not that he wasn't still mad. He still should have waited for backup.

'It was a turn on though.' Tony, aggravated at himself for that rogue thought, then downed his coffee. Using the resulting caffeine rush to fuel his confrontation with the arrogant Demon Lord, he made his way through the living room. He may have been a Lord in his time but he it was his name on his tower.
After the battle, he did credit the Demon for coming back to Stark Tower after the helicarriers arrived. Tony laughed when one of them tried to order Sesshomaru via loudspeaker to stay where he was on the Statue of Liberty. That resulted in Sesshomaru leaping onto the helicarrier and slicing the nose cone off one of Fury's F-22 Raptors with his whip. He should have predicted that outcome. Luckily Sailor Moon decided enough was enough and came back home.

Tony found Sesshomaru on the roof, sitting on the Quinjet staring intently off into the distance like something called out to him. Or maybe practicing for an upcoming photo shoot for that Jason Sisson. Yeah, he found out who his hot date was.

Toady sat next to him, suspiciously silent, and it didn't get past Tony that the atmosphere was tense.

Maybe they were discussing what exactly he heard inside his head when the space dragon came out of the mothership like a stripper out of a birthday cake.

Tony was beginning to really get sick of all these plasma readings he couldn't actually study.

"Hey toady, gotta talk to Sailor Moon here. Why don't you, Oh, I don't know, go find two friends and make a Budweiser commercial?" Tony strutted up to the Quinjet and Jaken balked.

"How dare you order me around! Lord Sesshomaru punish him for his insolence!" Jaken shook his fist.

"Leave us Jaken." Sesshomaru's deep voice rang out, but didn't turn to face Tony. Tony scrunched his face, suddenly irked.

"Yeah beat it, you know Michael Jackson don't you?" Jaken grumbled and with a dexterity Tony didn't know Jaken possessed, jumped down, landed on his feet, and muttered something about how AC/DC was better. Agreed.

"Hey, look, so Director Fury of the helicarrier 'who do I yell at first' is gonna come by. Not that I prefer it, but Cap loves a good Pow-Wow and Pepper gave me the 'you need to compromise' look. We gotta talk about how all this is gonna pla-hey are you ignoring me?!" Tony reacted as Sesshomaru still stared off in space, the wind blowing his hair softly.

"Oh my god. You. Princess. You're mad at me." This got Sesshomaru's attention and in a blink he was in front of Stark, so close Tony could see his razor blade sharp pupils dilate slightly.

So, he was mad at him? Game on. Tony grappled onto his simmering anger; he was going to give him hell.

"This Sesshomaru is no woman." Sesshomaru hissed, looking like he wanted to take Tony by the throat again. Tony couldn't help but try to take in all of his facial features. They hadn't been this close since he carried him.

He was right about him in Central Park. He was easier to rile up than Cap.

"I am so right, you do too sulk. Still hung up over me telling you off about the death-ship aren't you?" Tony challenged, shifting his weight to the balls of his feet.

"...this Sesshomaru is no child to be ordered about." Tony caught the minute tells that he was actually mad, and not just bored. His pupils shrank in, his ears even went back, like a dog's would.

"Yeah, yeah, I think we have confirmed you're an adult male, thanks Sex Ed. If you think I had a
problem with you going toe to toe with a murderous alien death-ship, you're right but not because I underestimated you." Tony flipped his wrists in a 'goddamnit just listen to me' pose. Sesshomaru calmed, interested.

"Explain." Sesshomaru's ears twitched, which Tony noticed. Tony still wanted to bite one. Angry sex always helped.

"I used to make weapons for a living. Big ones, bigger than that space ship's cannons, and could reap a higher death toll and payload. Hell, the nuke I threw into the first invasion's armada could have been mine. I've also been blown up by my own weapons. Not fun. So, when I see a super star destroyer coming I know it's gonna pack a punch. It had nothing to do with you not using your Backstreet Boy sword on it, but everything to do with its weaponry and capability!" Tony began to get mad, he also hated looking up to him. Sesshomaru had be like 6'2". Tony could see the twitch of the side of his lip downwards.

'Sailor Moon is accusing me of underestimating him, but I saw what happened to that one cannon shot. He had trouble containing it. It wasn't easy for him. If both shots had been accurate he would have been… no. I do not deal in what ifs.' Tony's eyes lit up in realization.

"In fact, I think you underestimated the cruiser and that's why you're really pissed." Tony's mouth crooked into a shit-eating grin and Sesshomaru's eyes widened marginally. Sesshomaru' talons released a bit of toxin onto the roof, sizzling it.

Oh yeah. Hammer meet nail.

"It's OK, I mean, we all can't be perfect, well I can, and am. I'm the exception. I mean, look at me. You can try to measure up to my greatness, I do like some good competition. But don't try to measure up by taking on another battleship solo again. Teamwork remember? I told you, you have the Avengers, and you have me and my tech. God, Capcicle would be so proud of me right now." Tony preened himself, relaxing. Sesshomaru still stood stock still, regarding Tony like a one would a creature they had never seen before. Tony began to feel a tingle on his skin. How much would Sailor Moon maim him if he did bite one of those wiggling ears?

'Is he like, looking me over like a predator would a meal? What in the hell is going on? Gods his skin is flawless; Pepper would probably want his skin care routine. Is it weird to notice skin? Christ, he is still wearing that Nirvana T-shirt. Where did he find it anyway?" Tony's thoughts rambled.

"...this Sesshomaru does what he pleases." Sesshomaru eventually replied, and Tony fucking lost it. His brown eyes lit up and poked Sesshomaru's hard chest with his finger. Which in hindsight may not have been his wisest idea since Sesshomaru positively growled, he could feel his chest rumble and that too turned him on.

He was so warm, and his finger tingled at his cotton t-shirt. He wondered what it would be like to touch his chest, skin to skin.

"No, not in fucking battle. Not when we are all working together to save our world. You should know how bad it is for one of your soldiers to go AWOL or do their own thing. We work together so no one gets hurt. You almost didn't suppress that blast. Do you really think we didn't notice your struggle?" Tony's voice dipped low, waiting for a response, any response from the stoic Demon Lord. Sesshomaru remained unresponsive, and the only one who could get him to respond was currently having a family reunion in a different dimension.

He was so done. Talking to Sailor Moon was like talking to a brick wall. People called him
stubborn! Maybe when Thor came back he could whack some sense into him.

"Or you know what? Fine. Do you! Go get your ass blown to tell and back! I'm sure Rin will understand. You know, how your stupid pride got you killed and left her an orphan again. Jaken will probably off himself, since he has no idea what to do without you! Oh, and Bambi! It's not like he wouldn't blame himself till Ragnarok for your death since, oh I don't know, he brought you into this! And don't forget about the Avengers! Clint won't stop gushing about your stupid death ray, and you're probably the only reason Bruce isn't a complete wreck. Steve, while angry at you too for taking on the Empire and not waiting for back up, still likes you despite everything he has ever known about Demons has been disproven. Trust me, he isn't one to throw previous teachings out the window. And you! You promised me you'd stay, and I really, really have a problem with people leaving." Tony out of breath from his rant finally removed his finger from Sesshomaru's chest.

He looked into Sesshomaru's eyes and saw nothing but an impassive stare.

Fuck it.

"What's more important to you? Your pride or us? We need you. I..." Tony's voice trailed off as he turned. If Sesshomaru didn't care about his wellbeing, then he wouldn't care about his. He started to walk away when he felt a steel hard grip on his wrist.

They had a thing for wrists, didn't they?

He looked back, Sesshomaru hadn't changed his facial features at all, but damned if his posture wasn't completely erect. His ears even looked a bit low.

'His hands are soft, I thought they'd be calloused or something.' Tony thought, then noticed the gnarly burn on the back of his left hand. He must have gotten hit by a Chitauri ray like Clint did. Tony frowned. If a rifle blast burned his skin like this, then if the cannon pierced his youki he wouldn't have stood a chance. Tony also noticed his wrist stripes were red, while the ones on his arms and face were still magenta. He was about to berate the Demon for his recklessness when he opened his mouth.

"...this Sesshomaru is no liability." Sesshomaru's words carried so softly Tony barely heard them.

The words smacked him like Mjolnir to the chest. That was not really the point Tony wanted to get across. Tony didn't understand how someone so intimidating could also sound so soft. Sesshomaru was a walking contradiction that continuously threw him for a loop.

'Doesn't he get that people care about him? Didn't he have any friends besides Loki growing up?' Tony's eyebrows shot up.

'That's it. Loki and Sesshomaru were probably each other's only friends. He must have some serious issues if Loki was his only childhood friend. Explains a metric shit ton.' A light bulb the size of the sun went off in Tony's head.

'I knew I should have eavesdropped in on Bambi's and Sailor Moon's heart to heart Christmas special the other night, but even I know some things should be private...at least Jarvis recorded it just in case.' Tony sighed deeply at Sesshomaru's unreadable expression.

"Look. Just...make sure that you heal your hand before Pepper gets here or she will make Bruce play nurse, and I know how much you'd like that." Tony wasn't sure how to follow up on the realizations he thought of. He also didn't know how his anger shriveled up so quickly. He wanted
it back again but couldn't seem to harness it.

The Tony Stark rant train had grinded to an unexpected halt.

Sesshomaru's eyes flickered down to his hand and back up to Tony's. Then Tony remembered what he really wanted to talk about in the first place.

"You know, I can put two and two together and sum up that those space hicks were trying to capture you. I don't think the others have made the connection, but I did." Tony twisted, but the grip Sesshomaru had on his wrist made it a bit awkward to face him head on. Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed.

"They aimed to capture either me or Loki. I do not know for what reason. Their babblings were not anything I concerned myself with…They will not be successful." Sesshomaru stated evenly, though Tony caught a hesitant edge to his voice that he didn't like.

"You were successful only because I had to use my laser to cut their voodoo leash, Lassie." Tony attempted flat humor, and Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles on his other hand. Tony grinned in victory.

He was not about to let some henchmen take what was rightfully his. He put up with Sailor Moon's strangulation urges, scrys, identity crises, and runnings away from home. Yes 'runnings'. Multiple. He dealt with his angsty teenager behavior, not anyone else.

"This Sesshomaru is not so easily subdued." Sesshomaru seethed and Tony could have sworn he looked hot and bothered. Was that a challenge? He wanted to ask him about the space dragon, he itched to ask him what in the hell he was doing around Soho all day yesterday. Yet instead, Tony had a head rush of an urge to do something else.

He wanted to grip his chin like one would a weapon. His eyes travelled up to his mouth, small and still, so unlike his own. Yeah, he knew he was a loudmouth, so what people should listen to him.

Everything about the Demon was almost human. It was if someone had tried to make a human, but sanded and whetted every possible feature, angle and attribute to a lethal, polished edge.

Where Tony was rough and rugged around the edges, everything about Sesshomaru was incessantly refined to a needle-sharp precision, well except for two things.

Tony Stark was notorious for many things: impulsiveness, bad decisions, binge drinking, being a coffee snob, and going after what he wanted relentlessly while ignoring any possible negative consequences were some.

So, when Tony closed the distance between them like a collision on the freeway, grabbing Sesshomaru by his jaw lifting himself up, planting his lips on his, he didn't really think.

He just went for it.

He could endorse Nike.

No. Nike should endorse him.

He relaxed his jaw and worked his own needy lips against Sesshomaru's testing, gathering data, examining. This is what he was waiting for. His head spun with the revelation that he wanted to know every millimeter of the Demon Lord. He wanted to know him so well he could map him into a hologram. Tony had to know if Sesshomaru's lips were as sharp as the rest of him, or if they were
an anomaly: yielding and pliant.

They were an anomaly and Christ did Tony love those.

Tony's pulse raced, his lips tasted fuller than he expected. The danger of kissing the Demon Lord pumped adrenaline through his veins. He did the only logical decision and deepened the kiss, because Tony never did anything half way or half-assed. He didn't think Sesshomaru did either.

The smooth, steel tight grip on his wrist loosened.

He flicked his tongue between his lips; he tasted like a nine-volt battery. Damn. He moved his hand to the back of his head and his hair felt smoother than fiber optics cables. He had to have more; he found the anomaly to beat all anomalies.

He raked his teeth on his bottom lip and sucked it hard, he wanted it to swell, he wanted evidence he did this to him. He wanted to claim him.

Tony fought a smile when the stone-rigid Sesshomaru slacked almost imperceptibly. Tony saw his opening and attacked. So far, so good.

He snaked his now free arm around Sesshomaru's back and brought their bodies flush together with a harsh tug, arc reactor thumping against the serpent on his white t-shirt. The arc reactor resonated warmly.

He didn't need Sesshomaru to reciprocate; he didn't need him to do anything at all except accept it. He chanced a real bite on his lower lip this time. A tingle of energy surged through him and coiled in his chest. The energy unique to Sesshomaru only, his youki vibrating under his skin caused a shiver down Tony's spine and the back of his triceps.

Something that Tony could only consider a small gasp escaped Sesshomaru's lips. Tony knew it. He would bring this Demon Lord down to earth.

Tony went in for the kill and shoved his tongue in. He wanted him to take it, but to rise to his challenge at the same time. He accidentally ran his tongue down and around his pointed fangs, he'd have to get used to those. Sesshomaru's lips then kneaded his own back with fervor. The response shocked him with its intensity, his own desire. Victory. Not easily subdued huh?

His pointed jaw relaxed and Tony scratched the back of Sesshomaru's head, curling his fingers through his long hair. It wasn't an action he intended, he never meant to caress him like that but he went with it. Sesshomaru hummed just the slightest bit, but Tony caught it.

'Oh yeah, Tony you still got it.' Tony smirked a bit that time. The warmth and mild sweetness that bombarded him made him want to give it to him right back. He curled his tongue and relished another anomaly.

'Christ is his mouth is tingly.' Tony fought Sesshomaru's tongue with his own, a heated, humid battle for dominance. Tony nearly moaned when claws grazed down the side of his neck and then down his back, teetering on that edge of lethal and…and…. loving?

His skin prickled in desire and the hair stood on the back of his neck and his groin tightened. An instinctual reaction that just with a little bit more pressure those talons would leave marks, could cut him, could kill him.

It put Tony into orbit, flirting (well now way past flirting), with the edge of a danger that he could curb. A danger he could bend his way, maybe even later into a ninety-degree angle.
His arc reactor whirred, powering up and his ankles warmed. Tony wondered if Sesshomaru had unleashed youki on the floor beneath them. He wasn't about to look. It would break everything.

Tony began to win their fight of dominance and that made him harden, going from half-mast to full on hard below deck. Sesshomaru picked up on it. Tony inhaled sharply, not a gasp he told himself, as the gorgeous Demon in front of him slipped his other hand down around his side to his groin, cupping and caressing his erection through his jeans.

'This was not Sailor Moon's first rodeo, he has some ski-lls. Yeah, but I am not one to be outdone.'

Tony finally moaned this time and Sesshomaru throtead a growl in response, his lips vibrating on his like a sex toy he knew he had around somewhere.

That growling wasn't fair.

In response, Tony tangled himself into him, hand through his hair, tongue in his mouth, hand cupping the curved, toned ass that always hid behind his hair. Sesshomaru continued his massage and Tony could feel the Demon Lord's own arousal jutting into his hip. Damn, how big was he? The same claws swept up his neck to come to rest as a full hand on his neck, thumb resting on the side of his jaw.

The action ran contrary to what Tony had expected. He envisioned the Demon Lord would have thrown him against something or tore him open by now. He thought this kiss would be a lot more macho, and a lot less intimate.

'Dann he is affectionate. Didn't see that one coming.' Tony pulled away to catch his breath and saw Sesshomaru's usually slit pupils, were blown out in lust. His lips glistened, swollen and pink, and Tony knew he looked probably just as undone.

'This is new. This is incredible. His lips, his skin, everything about him strums with energy. He is the most alive person I've ever seen.' Tony's body was still flush up against his, eyes locked on his gold ones like a missile targeting system. Tony relaxed into the Demon Lord's slender, lanky frame, just a bit. Tony could allow himself a little bit of weakness here, sometimes it did feel good for someone else to hold himself up for a change.

Tony read the raw emotion Sesshomaru stared him down with like lines of code.

It frightened and flattered him at the same time, because he wasn't sure if he was picking up only lust from him. A rare wave of self-consciousness swept across Tony, he wasn't used to looking in someone's eyes like this after playing a round of tonsil hockey. Usually he was too focused on taking his clothes off, or too drunk to care.

Sesshomaru's claws had glided their way down to Tony's shoulders. Before he knew it, he was pushed back against the front landing strut of the Quinjet. The action almost knocked the air out of him. Tony wanted to throw the 'subdued' thing back at Sesshomaru, but it would ruin the current mood and he could always do it later.

"I bet that Jason Sissy-pants didn't kiss you like that." Tony panted, then he wondered exactly how good his breath smelled, he did drink a lot of coffee. Eh, Fuck it, deed done.

Sesshomaru didn't respond with words. He opted instead to counter attack, fangs raking across Tony's lips, tongue lashing out into his mouth quick and precise like his whip. Sesshomaru teased his hard on with a couple quick strokes. Tony didn't have a chance to respond from the sudden
attack before Sesshomaru pulled back, lips parted and bangs askew. Tony wanted to provoke that out of the Demon Lord again, not just because it felt so good to be so close, but also because in that moment he wasn't perfectly guarded.

"You would bet against this Sesshomaru again?" Sesshomaru smirked, a barely there lift of his lips and glint in his eye. Tony wanted to scowl, it wasn't the exact answer he wanted but he would run with it. Did that wanna-be kiss him or not?

"I'll wear that ridiculous outfit again if he did." Tony pushed off with his back from the landing gear and took Sesshomaru again, only this time with the expressed intention to see those abs again. He wanted that stupid Nirvana shirt off, like yesterday.

Off went Nirvana. 'Come as you are' played in his head.

He hadn't seen him shirtless since that shower which felt like eons ago. He wanted to trace the stripes that streaked up his sides and arced over his hips with his fingers or his tongue. He was just too pale, too smooth, and that silvery happy trail that fuzzed down from his navel...sexy was an understatement.

Tony couldn't help it; he went to his tiptoes. Which was really awkward because he didn't usually kiss anyone taller than he was, but he went straight for the left ear anyway. He sucked the lobe and ignored a growl. He then retaliated by shoving his hand roughly down the front of Sesshomaru's jeans, hand gliding across his pubic hair. So, the Demon went commando, good to know.

Tony found exactly what he was looking for, his fingers teased the base of Sesshomaru's cock as he sucked his earlobe harder. This time the growl turned into a gravelly, low bark. Tony needed his own shirt off now. Sorry, not sorry, Black Sabbath.

'OK, he isn't slicing me into coleslaw so this seems promising...' Tony's mind landed on the Quinjet, 'Oh yeah that could work...' Tony's mind stuck on his growing need, now damp with pre-cum in his pants. Tony's body fired on all cylinders; he had to finish taking the Demon Lord apart. They had time. He removed his hand from Sesshomaru's jeans and traced his stripes up his body till he reached his shoulders.

"You. Me. Quinjet. Now." Tony murmured in his pointed ear. His lats really were as strong as wires on a suspension bridge, just covered in satiny ivory skin. Tony didn't care if they didn't have lube, they would make something work. Tony was anything but resourceful. That one time in Iceland when he didn't have a condom he….

Sesshomaru reared back and in an instant his Nirvana shirt was back on, back to him. A stinging pang of rejection shot Tony through. What? What did he say?

"Hey guys! You guys might want to come down here, we have, um, sort of a situation." Steve popped up from the roof access and Tony never wished for a rogue lightning strike more in his life. Tony zipped up his fly, hiding his own 'situation' before Steve caught him.

'Steve, I'm gonna get you back for this. I swear you are the biggest cock block of all time.' Tony turned around to an oblivious Steve now peeking out from behind the door. Sesshomaru must have heard him, or smelled him, or something. So, he didn't strike out.

Tony Stark, you're still at bat.

"What now stars-and-stripes?!" Tony didn't even have anything witty to say as he urged his hard-on to make a hasty retreat.
'Think Fury kissing Agent...ugh what a waste of good wood. This better be good, like Clint decided to cross dress, no better, like...'' Tony's mind failed to think of any good reason with an opening like that to interrupt his romp in the Quinjet.

"You gotta just come down and see the TV." Steve almost pleaded. So now Cap wants to join 21st century. Tony sighed heavy. He turned back to Sesshomaru, who while composed, had his ears up in alert.

Tony wondered if another body part of his was still up too.

"I swear Cap if you just now found 'Touched by an Angel' reruns or Clint roped you into one of his pranks I'm getting Little Miss Sunshine to paint flowers on your shield." Tony, reluctantly, started to follow Steve down the stairs, mood ruined.

He heard the TV before he saw it. Tony should have seen this coming. He really should have. Tony ran a hand down his face and crossed his arms. On the TV was channel 8 news, showing shaky clips of Sesshomaru twirling his whip, slicing the Chitauri up like blender, their blood spraying across the pavilion. Family friendly fun for prime-time TV.

Another video clip of Sesshomaru bringing the Rage Machine back to reality, snapping him out of his uncontrollable rage in the nick of time to save Toady and some little girl.

Different angle, another camera phone of Sesshomaru jumping into the air and powering up, then hesitating, then pointing the beam a bit off course and unleashing it. Tony paused at that one, Sesshomaru didn't seem like the type to hesitate, why would he change his trajectory of his shot... then Tony remembered.

He was at that those coordinates. He changed his attack to miss him. Oh, he would use this sentiment against the Demon Lord later.

A shakier clip then played of the Hulk decimating some of the Chitauri, while Sesshomaru made dog food out of the others. Which officially made Sailor Moon and Rage Machine a terrifying team.

Reminder: never challenge those two to a demolition derby.

Tony's jaw dropped when another clip, this one in better focus, caught Sesshomaru decapitating a Chitauri and then throwing the severed head at another Chitauri, only to seconds later eviscerate him. Clint chuckled as it showed Sesshomaru flick the blood onto the sidewalk like he just washed his hands.

And this was the guy he just mauled his roof. Tony forced himself to be grossed out at that he felt oddly turned on. This was unknown territory; he shouldn't like someone who did this.

"What Fancy Pants, no touchdown celebration? Not even a spike?" Clint's eyes flashed tauntingly at the Demon Lord who simply looked his way. Clint rolled a bandaged shoulder. He had gotten winged by a Chitauri ray blast after Sesshomaru left Central Park.

"No one can call you inefficient, but was that really necessary?" Steve sighed, hand over his mouth.

"They disrespected me. That lowly trash did not deserve to have their bodies in tact." Sesshomaru placidly replied. Steve facepalmed.

The last clip was of Sesshomaru standing on the tip of the fountain with one foot and firing again
upon the chariots with a shock of green energy. The scene then cut to another shaky video of
Sesshomaru talking to Clint, Steve and Tony.

"Oh hey, they got my good side." Tony smirked.

"Just who is Mr. Nirvana?! Is he the newest Avenger?! That's the question on everyone's lips! Let's
go to the streets!" The image shifted to an attractive reporter at Central Park, with people clustered
all around her, seeking their fifteen seconds of fame.

Oh, this is going to make Fury all warm and fuzzy inside.

"I don't care who he is, I'm just glad he is kicking alien ass and rocks Nirvana! Wooo Nirvana!"

"He is so cool! Is he single? I love his hair and his tattoos! They are so epic! Tribal is back!"

"I was in the park when he was there! The bro totalled those aliens like they were made of rolling
paper. He cut one of their heads off his own hands and threw it another one. Savage!"

"I'm glad he is on our side, even if he isn't human. This city needs all the help it can get, even from
good aliens!"

"He's so flashy! Mr. Nirvana sign my tits!"

"Oh, sorry viewers for the explicit language, as we warned earlier this material may not be suitable
for all viewers. Up next: we also have word that our very own traffic copter: Chopper Dave got a
shot of this mysterious new Avenger, Mr. Nirvana, taking out the alien spaceship from the Statue
of Liberty. Stay tuned to channel 8!" Steve groaned and Clint shook his head as the scene cut to the
ship's doors opening to reveal the dragon coiling out. Then the eventual shot that would disable
then the imploded cannon blast.

Chopper Dave should get a raise.

"Lord Sesshomaru! These humans praise you for your strength, however they are most untoward!"
Jaken ran up to him, pointing to the TV.

"I am aware." Sesshomaru cut a glance to Tony and he would have blushed if he were a lesser
man.

'Oh, like you didn't enjoy it.' Tony set his jaw, but didn't feel any real anger.

"Who is this new hero? Where did he come from? Is Loki back? All we know is that the Chitauri
are back an—" Steve muted the TV. Tony didn't know what had Steve's stars and stripes all in a
knot. All of this was going to have to happen eventually. Let Fury have his tantrum.

"What do we do? I mean, they're going to put two and two together that uh.. 'Mr. Nirvana' is here." Steve crossed his arms, gesturing to tower.

"We won't do anything till Pepper gets here, she is flying in from LA. She will know what to do.
Till then, take a siesta! Jarvis full privacy on the tower." Tony ordered and the glass on the tower
fluctuated and turned tinted.

"Done sir." Jarvis reported. Tony looked around, noticing that Bruce had just came up the stairs.

"Hey, did I miss your photo shoot?" Bruce joked, but he still looked shaken and wan.

"Tony says they got his good side, but I don't think such a side exists." Clint ribbed trying to
lighten Bruce's mood.

"Um, who in this room is the only one in world's top five most eligible bachelors?" Tony retorted flawlessly.

"Well, after this photo shoot, there might be two." Bruce chimed in, pointing to the muted TV at the female and male admirers flocking central park with photos, some with surprising high resolution.

Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and Clint just laughed again. Tony swore if he saw that wanna-be Jason Sisson got on TV he'd hack the network. But there was one thing that still didn't make any sense to the inventor. The close captions had talked about the death ray, the star destroyer, the storm troopers, everything except…

"So, why is no one else talking about fantasia coming out of the mothership and talking to everyone in their minds?" Everyone turned to Tony like he had said that he would quit being Iron Man.

Pause.

"What in the hell? Did you hit your head?" Clint asked, rolling his non-injured shoulder.

"Not today. Didn't anyone else see it? The giant space dragon. You know, the one who came out like a jack-in-the-box out of the space ship. He was talking to Sailor Moon, mentioned something about a bastard and orders to capture him. He called him an Eternal, and talked about Loki." Tony explained and the room fell silent.

"Loki?" Clint's expression turned less skeptical and more curious.

"I know I'm hard to take your eyes off of… But really no one saw it?" Tony recovered with a joke, was he really going crazy?

"Tony...I can tell you're not drunk, but when was the last time you slept?" Bruce ventured. Damnit Bruce mind your own circadian rhythm.

"Um, maybe fifty hours. That's not the point. I know what I saw, Jarvis scanned it. It said it had orders to capture either Bambi or Moonie over here." Tony shot back, blood getting hot. Why did no one else see it? It was recorded, they just saw it on the news courtesy of Chopper Dave. Why SHIELD didn't immediately subpoena the traffic helo footage was beyond Tony, but it amused him more than anything.

"So, you not only saw, but heard him. Ryukotsusei." Sesshomaru finally stated and Tony turned to him, exasperated. Now he says something. And Ryu kitty? Why did that sound familiar?

"Wait. So, there actually was a space dragon and Tony isn't hallucinating? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?" Clint said smirking, but hardly meaning it. Tony narrowed his eyes at him. Maybe he should make Clint wait on the toxins he perfected.

"That insolent human must have been able to understand and see Ryukotsusei with your youki in his suit Lord Sesshomaru!" Toady piped up. Where did he come from? No one better tell Pepper about the youki juice in his suit. She definitely couldn't sell that to Stark Enterprises as a part of his new clean energy proj...oh no. He had to check the Tower's arc reactor.

Why did this have to happen to him?
"His youki is in your suit? Tony that sounds beyond reckless." Steve complained, and Tony rolled his eyes. 'Don't give me the 'calculated risks' thing Steve, I already gave that speech today, I get a 'get-out-of-Capsicles'-look-before-you-leap-seminar-free' pass.' Tony sighed.

"Not intentional. Sort of. Long story. Getting off topic. What's up with puff the magic dragon?" Tony steered the topic back on track. He was not going to let this go.

"Ryukotsusei was a Dragon Demon from my time, he perished long before I arrived here. I had never encountered him personally, but…members of my family had. What you saw, Stark, was his spirit from the underworld." Sesshomaru carefully explained. Oh. Hot. Shwarma. That was the dragon who killed his dad, and subsequently ruined his life.

'He handled that a lot better than I would have. I would have absolutely lost my shit if I found out that someone killed my old man and he came back to order me around. Well, maybe not. Mostly my mom….Wait. Underworld? Am I in the Sixth Sense? Can I see dead people now? Tony whipped around.

"Let me get this straight, the dragon who killed your father, came out of a Chitauri space ship and wanted to…capture you or Loki?" Bruce chuckled, as if the question itself made absolutely no sense, and it didn't.

"Dragon spirit. He came from the Demon underworld. Never thought I'd say it, but good thing Loki is in Asgard, he would have flipped out." Clint corrected, ever quick on the uptake.

"So, are we now saying that there is an underworld and that Demons can literally come out of it?" Steve looked pale, like he was about to throw up into the nearest receptacle. He hoped it would be Clint's quiver.

"You blubbering humans! Of course there is a Demon Underworld! Lord Sesshomaru, do we have to explain everything to them?!" Jaken blurted out and Sesshomaru brought down his fist to knock him unconscious.

The room silently thanked him.

"Um can we talk about how I can apparently see dead people now?" Tony collected his thoughts, and no one apparently listened to him.

"It can be about you some other time Tony. Sesshomaru, where did the dragon go? Is it a threat?" Steve's voice became serious; he was in impending invasion mode.

"He was never any threat to this Sesshomaru. I utilized Tenseiga to return his soul to the Demonic Underworld where it belonged." Sesshomaru explained and sighed through his nose. Tony could tell he didn't like this line of questioning.

"Demons exorcising other Demon ghosts, are we the ghostbusters now too?" Tony still couldn't get past that not only did he see the Demon ghost, he heard it speak to him!

"Well, if it is something strange, and it 'don't' look good….they do usually call us." Clint pointed out next to him smiling next and this time Bruce manage to smirk. Steve and Sesshomaru, per usual, stood completely confused.

"Stark." Tony automatically turned to Sesshomaru. It wasn't often he said his name with such seriousness. "I did not purify Ryukotsusei. Tenseiga cannot purify souls outside of the underworld. He has the ability to cut beings not of this world only, including the dead, and the undead." Sesshomaru pressed and Tony's mind whirred to read in between the lines of what he was trying to
"Dibs on him for the zombie apocalypse." Clint raised his hand and Jaken just then began to rise up along with Tony's blood pressure. Clint calling dibs? Um, no he staked that claim first. Wait, Tony got it.

"You have a sword, that can't cut organic, but can cut inorganic matter? Oh, prove it. So, prove it. Cut me." Tony's eyes lit up. He had to see how this was supposed to work. Was it chaos theory? Did the blade simply just go through him? Did it stop? Did the Jedi force keep it from touching him?

"Tony. Take this seriously." Steve warned, he was obviously not seeing how potentially cool this could be.

"Oh this I gotta see." Clint leaned back as if he was about to watch a fight in a hockey game.

"Tony, I told Pepper tha—" Bruce was cut off by Sesshomaru unsheathing N*sync with his left hand. Tony immediately noticed the burn on his hand healed, interesting. N*sync, compared to its destructive sister, Backstreet boy, appeared completely normal. The only thing was that the steel glinted a bit blue.

Sesshomaru, with an aristocratic flourish, butterflied the blade around and slashed through the air. Tony stood defiant, locking eyes with the regal demon across the room. He wasn't going to flinch, there was no room to back out now.

Sesshomaru brought Tenseiga down right at the juncture where his neck met his shoulders with a blow that Tony had seen cleave a Chitauri neatly in two, possibly a Volvo.

Everyone in the room jumped except for Clint who grabbed his bow. Tony made a note to thank him for that instant reaction, it was a better one than what Point Break did in the Quinjet when he got strangled.

But, not only did the force of the blow not hurt, it felt more like a blade of grass on his shoulder, than a blade of steel. It looked sharp, but it was actually dull. Tony had to study it. Sesshomaru then flipped the blade and cut through a side table with a fraction of the force. He didn't like that table anyway.

"Damn, I was so gunning for chaos theory." Tony twisted his lips together and Bruce took off his glasses, knowing full well what Chaos Theory was. Tony swore he saw amusement dancing in Sesshomaru's gold eyes. He wanted to see those pupils blown out again.

"I was going to say 'me next' but I think I'm good." Clint yielded, putting down his bow.

"But, what you're implying is that if we run into one of those spirits again, you're the only one who can…get rid of it?" Steve ventured a guess and Sesshomaru turned to him, sheathing the real mystery sword.

"Tenseiga removes such obstacles, not I." Tony couldn't tell if Sesshomaru was being purposely cryptic to completely grate on Steve's nerves or not but it jazzed him. Sesshomaru wasn't going anywhere, Tony would make sure of it.

"But…how did Dragonforce get on the Chitauri ship in the first place?" Tony pressed, he didn't know what made Sailor Moon's weird Demon world so intriguing, but it just was.

"This Sesshomaru is not certain. However, it is doubtful that he did so on his own accord."
Ryukotsusei was many things, subservient was not one of them. He begged for his end."
Sesshomaru explained, curling a finger to his lips in thought.

"Well, if Thanos can make a God of Mischief do his dirty work, it's possible the same could be said for a dragon... I can't believe I just said that. Dragons, Gods, Demons? I really should have stayed away from all of this. I almost decimated Central Park! Killed a little girl, again." Bruce looked a little green and a hell of a lot more tired.

If Bruce kept up with him in the lab he hadn't slept much either, one reason for the hulk-out.

Surprisingly, Sesshomaru walked right up to Bruce and stood next to him.

"This Sesshomaru is in your debt. You protected my retainer, Jaken, when I miscalculated. You may request something of this Sesshomaru of equivalent worth." Sesshomaru's voice sounded crisp and even.

"Oh my Lord! I knew you cared about me!" Jaken began to literally cry in happiness. Suck up. Bruce shot Tony a mischievous look. Tony raised his eyebrows.

'Oh man, he better not try anything funny. He better not request anything lewd. Bruce has to respect the bro code.' Tony's jaw dropped when he realized what he had just thought in terms of that Jason guy, Clint, and now Bruce.

Since when did his craving to jump Sesshomaru's bones turn into a weird possessiveness?

'I have get this out of my system. I can't be getting territorial over a prissy Demon Lord I just met. Tony Stark doesn't do territorial or possessive. Tony Stark does easy sex, 'hit it and quit its'. What do the teens call it these days? Netflix and chill? I just do flings, the more the better. I'm just... simply curious. I can keep my cool, figure out what he's all about, and then drop him like a bad habit. It will be easy, just like all the rest, except Pepper of course.' Tony reassured himself and took a deep breath, tapping his arc reactor out of habit.

"Well, I'd really like you to help me with..." Bruce paused and Tony knew it was on purpose because he smirked his way. Bastard. "the other guy. You are pretty much the only person, err, Demon? That I've met that the green guy listens to." Bruce sheepishly requested and Sesshomaru appeared to have seen it coming.

"This Sesshomaru accepts. We shall begin now. Come... Banner." Sesshomaru motioned him to follow, saying his name for the first time that Tony could tell.

Huh, he was the last one to be called by his name.

"Um, uh, ok, where we going?" Bruce, caught off guard, but bright with hope let loose a breath and began to follow. Another cock block. I'm blue balling it over here while Bruce green guys it with him.

'I want everything about Sesshomaru out of my system, now.' Tony's pulse picked up in anxiety.

"...to my old quarters." Sesshomaru spared a quick, and since Tony was a betting man, he guessed a teasing glance, back at him. Tony knew should have filled substorage room 3b with crates. He would tomorrow, or maybe he would get frisky later with the Demon Lord in it. Having him sit, or bent over one of those crates, with his stupid long silver hair and his abs he wanted to run his tongue over.
'Oh, he wants to play games? You chose the wrong player. I am so in. Operation: Hit It and 'Sho'get It, is on.' Stark crossed his arms over his chest, ready for a completely different type of battle.

At least that's what he told himself.

Chapter End Notes

Oh yeah, things are heating up between two of our favorite characters! Hope you liked it, please let me know how you like it, my life force are comments! :)

-TL
Loki and the Frigid Throne

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Loki and the Frigid Throne

*(*)

Loki, upon returning to his old chambers, felt little for conversation. His fingers twitched by his sides and his back muscles gripped his spine like a beast's jaws.

It was precisely as he left it: the curled scrolls on his desk, the dusty spell books on his shelves, the glowing crystals in his displays, the green garments in his closet. They had not even repaired the punctures in the wood of his desk, nor in his wall from the fury of his throwing daggers.

Frigga. Somewhere in the depths of her heart she surely couldn't bear parting with her son that was oh-so long gone.

As much as it would feel nice to be warmed from such sentiment, it was truly beyond him. She preserved his room precisely as it was like a mausoleum. Her son was dead; the monster lived in his stead. It was why she didn't believe him even when he implored her about the impending invasion. Even when his body was too broken to conjure his illusions to appear he was alright.

The empathy was there, yet the trust wasn't. Not that he truly thought she'd give it, but that had never stopped Loki from wanting. It is what he did.

He wanted. he wanted power, wanted to dig his fingers deep into the stringy heart muscles of the Other, wanted to see his friend cleave the head off The Mad Titan's purple shoulders, wanted Clint's hands all over him.

Clint running flat of his tongue over his hand, sticky from the ice cream, stroking the sweetness from it. He had to grab his hand. It wanted it to be his…Loki. Focus.

Everything. Everything hinged on the outcome of his mission and he had to concentrate and hone his wits and magic to pull it off just so. Loki usually never had trouble focusing, so it irked him to no end that he was so distracted. He bit the inside of his cheek, damn that mortal Clint!

Luckily Romanoff and Rin caught onto his mood and left him be, well at least after Romanoff told him his father was a real piece of work, to which he was greatly inclined to agree.

Rin had asked him why his father didn't like her picture and he told her the truth: that he was a bitter, blinded warlord. He cared not for things he didn't see from what he could not personally gain. If it didn't help him personally, it could easily be swept aside, or stored until needed.

Always. Always he was the thing swept aside, or stored to be Thor's lesser. Being back in his old chambers freshened the old wounds. He never had a chance to be his equal. No matter what he did, or how hard he tried to excel at magic or tactics, Thor was the only champion of Asgard. Before the Bifrost, this greatly bothered him, especially when he much younger.

Loki commonly tagged along with Thor, the Warriors Three and Sif, but he knew deep down that they only humored him because he was Thor's younger brother. When growing up, he had never met anyone who preferred his company over his brother's.
Until Sesshomaru. Loki cared not that in Asgardian years he was perhaps nine years Sesshomaru's senior, Sesshomaru matured quite quickly for his age.

Loki remembered the first time he and Sesshomaru truly bonded.

"Hey! Are you the God of Lies?!" A much younger Loki lifted his head to see two Dark Elves, a Fire Giant, and a Panther Demon gathered in front of him. The leader obviously the taller, scrutinizing Dark Elf. Loki inwardly groaned, he just wanted to be left alone to study his runes, he was already late. Loki tapped his foot on the dirt path.

"If I were to deny it, you couldn't believe me could you? And if you didn't think I am and answered yes, would you think it the truth? No, you couldn't. So, don't you think your question was just a tad needless? Not that I would expect any higher thinking coming from you lot." Loki responded wryly. He knew he was outnumbered, but cocked his jaw up strongly anyway, he could take them. It wouldn't be a flawless victory but he had just learned that new spell...

He would even get a few battle scars to show Allfather.

"You going to pick a fight with us little Prince?! We're gonna teach you a lesson! No one disrespects anyone around here!" The Fire Giant bulked out his underdeveloped chest. Loki had studied Fire Giants, this one was clearly an adolescent. He also apparently had an underdeveloped brain.

Loki chuckled. He cared not what harm came to him, and he was not above dirtying his tunic to educate some half-wits on proper form and technique. Magic coiled at his fingertips.

"Respect is earned not given. Remember, because I am not my brother Thor does not mean I cannot fight!" Loki stood, immediately tiring of their moronic exchange. He took a fighting stance and prepared to for a four on one that may not end cleanly, or his way. Loki scrunched his nose that he hadn't quite perfected his duplication spell enough to properly fight all of them and hold his concentration.

The Fire Giant approached him from behind and the Panther Demon converged on him from the left, both of the Dark Elves flanked from the right. Loki spun around. Right then he saw a patch of white behind the Fire Giant and the Panther Demon. Who would be all the way out this far? Oh. Him.

Loki spotted the young and bored Dog Demon walking down the path their way. Sesshomaru was it? He had met him the other day and was supposed to start studying with him today.

"Move, you are in this Sesshomaru's way." Sesshomaru quipped to the Panther Demon. Loki chuckled, this truly was the same Demon who told off his brother a few days ago. 'He can't be seriously trying to intimidate them. Those two are much larger and stronger than he is. Sure he is fast but speed is not everything.' Loki studied the approaching Demon, sensing no hidden power.

"Who do you think you are pipsqueak?! Did the pretty little princess Dog Demon ge-" In an instant the Panther Demon's throat and upper body were ensnared in a vibrant green whip. With a dancer's grace, Sesshomaru curved his body clockwise and slung the Demon far through the air and into the nearby lake.

Kerplunk!
So, mayhap a bit stronger than Loki originally gave him credit for.

“That's it you're going down!” The Fire Giant launched himself Sesshomaru and he dodged just barely. Fire Giants could be much faster than they looked. Sesshomaru's hands glowed green and he rebounded and gracefully side kicked him down the path.

'Facinating. Maybe this won't be such a bore to be stuck with this Demon after all.' Loki wasted no time in joining the scuffle, he was no damsel needing rescue.

In the end, they managed to toss all of them into the lake. They made a highly effective team for their first time aligning.

As Sesshomaru was healing a mild burn on his arm with his youki Loki approached.

"I, Prince Loki of Asgard, didn't require the assistance you provided. I am an adept fighter and those ruffians were nothing compared to me." Loki bit out. Only Thor had attempted to come to his aid before, he didn't know why this waif of a Demon had decided to do so now. It puzzled him, Loki prided himself on reading people quite well, but he couldn't read this Demon.

He didn't seem like the type to go around saving people, and he didn't seem like he cared for Thor's favor, thus coming to his younger brother's aid to gain acclaim.

"This Sesshomaru did not engage my opponents for your sake. They would not vacate the space I wished to occupy." Sesshomaru's eyes hardened and he looked up at Loki apathetically. Loki could spot a lie, and while he could tell he wasn't lying, it didn't seem like the whole truth.

They both stared at each other for a moment, measuring the other up.

"I have heard of a great cavern over yonder that is rumored to be inhabited by Weasel Demons who guard a stolen crystal, wish to accompany me to explore?" Loki offered with a wicked grin slicing his face. Perhaps this Demon would be somewhat fun, and it wasn't like they were about to go to their study session now. He also wanted help acquiring his magic crystals.

"...this Sesshomaru approves." Loki noticed while Sesshomaru's face revealed little of his emotions, his ears lifted.

"Let's be on our way then, before our friends decide to learn to swim." Loki smiled widely and gestured to the path around the lake. Sesshomaru spared a glance to the lake and huffed, following. Side by side they made their way to the cavern, stopping every so often to skip a stone into the same lake they threw their opponents into.

The same lake two days later Sesshomaru would get thrown into by the same tall dark elf and his friends when they ambushed him.

Loki may or may not have magicked a swarm of Asgardian hornets to harass them for days.

"Guards leave us, your presence is just as well on the outside of the doors." He snapped out of his memory, hearing his mother, Frigga's voice. He knew she was simply an illusion, that Odin would not want her visiting in person. Loki sat up from his leaned over position on his bed, straightening.

He knew the guards wouldn't try anything to prevent the queen from speaking to him if that is what she so wished. Odin dare not anger her that much.
"Yes mother, you look lovely as always, but you seem strained." Loki chose his words carefully; he couldn't risk sounding too concerned over his mother or she would simply brush it off. In reality, she appeared to have been overusing her magic.

Loki fought a frown itching on his face, his mother could sometimes be too self sacrificing.

"Strained? My dear I have never been more relieved. I have been watching you my son, I had to scry you. On Midgard you were blocked by Heimdall's sight, especially with the weakened Bifrost he could not see you due to some interference. I knew you had to have gone to Midgard after Sesshomaru. You always did look after each other." Frigga confessed, folding her hands, smiling brightly.

Loki's eyes flickered with confusion.

'Heimdall's sight was blocked? No wonder Odin didn't send the Warriors Three and Sif to Midgard to hunt me down, he had no idea where I actually was and until he did, there no use to waste his black magic.' Loki's face twisted, there were hardly any ways left to block Heimdall's sight. He had the magic reserves now to hide from Heimdall if need be, but when he first arrived on Midgard he did not. Blocking his sight took a highly powerful magic barrier or…

Youki interference.

"That would have to be due to Sesshomaru's proximity barrier. It seems to have a multitude of purposes. It alerts him to incoming foes, along with blocking my magic signature and now apparently Heimdall's sight." Loki mused, he wondered if Stark ever got the proximity barrier working on a large enough scale if Heimdall's sight of Midgard would be blocked completely.

Precisely like what happened all those centuries ago to Midgard when the Demons vanished.

"I see, he was protecting you." Frigga put a finger to her lips and Loki had to fight a snort. Sesshomaru most likely conjured the proximity barrier to prevent Odin from interfering with their chat, not to protect him from Odin. "It seems like he has matured muchly. I remember you would smuggle him into Asgard to witness your spells and pranks. You formed quite the brotherly bond with him." Frigga continued and Loki caught the suggestive lilt in her tone of voice.

"Mother, I had Odin summon him to prevent our realms from devastation, not for revelry." Loki didn't necessarily warn, but reinforced. He didn't want his mother thinking him simply nostalgic.

"I know you say that, but you cannot deny you are pleased that you have indeed reconnected." Frigga paused. "You searched for so long on Midgard for any clue as to the disappearance of all the Demons. I remember I could not scry them either." Frigga confessed, which piqued Romanoff's attention. Loki recalled his mother was the only one in Asgard who genuinely felt remorse and not simple mystification for their disappearance.

"So, Pretty Boy's species just up and vanished off Earth?" Romanoff interjected, pausing in her training of her new protégé, Rin.

"I know not of what happened. I was in Alfheim at the time. No one on Asgard knows what happened either, as Heimdall's sight of Midgard was blocked. When Thor and I returned from Alfheim, Midgard not only had no Demons, but any evidence and memories of them were erased. I searched in vain for a century. No one I have met, from any of the Nine Realms or otherwise, has had any information." Loki confessed, Romanoff nodding in understanding.

"Explains a lot." Romanoff shrugged and Loki nodded. Rin simply practiced a simple kata,
unperturbed.

"Mother, you must know that Sesshomaru can now scry. He does so dangerously. He goes deep into his scrys as if mindless. He tried to scry another powerful sorcerer and I fear that something malicious happened when he saw Astral Plane. Have you any advice for me in aiding him, as you know my magic has never had an affinity for scrying." Loki twisted his mouth in a frown and Frigga laughed softly.

"Loki, your friend is no mere seer." Frigga suddenly became serious and Loki's jaw dropped in confusion. "I saw him on the Astral Plane." Now that floored Loki, his eyes momentarily bugged out.

"On the…how? No one, not the Kree, the Skrulls, the Vanir, the Aesir, not even the Celestials have been able to access the Astral Plane in millennia! The secret was lost when the last Adept fell. The Celestials even tried those genetic experiments!" Loki sputtered, baffled was an understatement. The Astral Plane wove itself in between and through dimensions, it was as enigmatic and potentially powerful as the Odinforce.

'The Celestials genetically tampered with the Kree, Skrulls, and Midgardian mortals in an attempt to breed beings to access the Astral Plane, but all those experiments failed. The Mad Titan himself is a result of one such genetic experiment.' Loki's thoughts wandered, surely his mother wouldn't be mistaken, but how could it be possible?

Possible without the Tesseract at least. Loki had not tried to go to the Astral Plane with it, but he knew of any of the Infinity Gems, the Tesseract would have that ability.

"I wouldn't say millennia…centuries ago when Midgard was blocked from Heimdall there was someone on the Astral Plane. They were shrouded from me properly seeing them, but they hid something of great power there. Your Demon friend, Sesshomaru, has the ability to go to and harness the Astral Plane. I doubt he knows of what he is doing, he was visible to any sorcerer and could have been subjected to a curse." Frigga's voice turned a bit more serious and Loki's lip twitched up like a nervous tic. A curse?

"My Lord has been cursed?!!" Rin piped up. Oh, that would upset her. Loki swiftly turned as Rin approached Frigga, head tilted to the side, lips tightly curved in a frown.

"Worry not little one, your Lord appears to be quite resilient." Frigga smiled warmly then flicked her eyes to Loki. It was a tell of hers, Frigga didn't lie often.

Loki caught Romanoff's watchful eye, and he surmised she suspected the same. She murmured something in Rin's ear Loki didn't catch and took her aside to draw.

"Mother, assuredly you have theories behind all of this." Loki wasted no time. He didn't anticipate the issue of Sesshomaru's new ability to be such a disaster. Potentially, if Sesshomaru could be properly schooled in the Astral Plane he could harness its tremendous energy and defeat the Mad Titan exponentially easier.

Or, it could back fire and not even Loki knew what that could mean.

"You fret so over matters you cannot control, son. I have a feeling what your Demon friend is going through can only be solved by him. You need to focus on yourself, What I just saw in the throne room makes that astoundingly clear. You have grown so much; you are now a truly powerful sorcerer, and even more important, a good man." Frigga informed, and Loki chest hitched and he fought a gasp. She didn't show one of her more knowing tells. She spoke the truth.
'A good man? Not a monster? Wasn't that Thor's speech? What was this?' Loki's eyes flashed wide and a green spark shot from his fingertips.

"Don't look at me so. How could I not think this about you? I saw your display when your friend Sesshomaru gave his explanation of his strategy. I am profoundly sorry my dear Loki. I had no idea that is what happened to you, when you first fell from the Bifrost I was unable to scry you. I should have trusted you, I should have seen past that sorcerer's influence and his awful magic. I just can't apologize to you enough." Frigga's illusion fuzzed out a bit and Loki snapped out of his trance. He hadn't expected this at all, his mouth went dry and he ran a hand through his hair to calm it and himself.

"Mother you need not apologize. As you are aware, I am quite adept at trickery." Loki found a genuine smile form on his face. The crushing, grating weight of his own mother no longer trusting him lifted, he stood straighter than he had in a long time.

"Your trickery may be able to fool me, but not Yggrasil." Frigga's illusion waivered once more. Apparently, the Nines chose today to bombard him with information he neither knew he needed nor wanted.

It didn't help that Loki suspected his mother was being purposely vague and hiding some things from him. It was so like her. She did it when he was growing up so he could unravel the problem on his own but now was really not the time. Despite how relieved he felt that his mother didn't see him as what he truly was, impatience broiled in him once more.

Loki, paced, turned on his heel, and his magic coiled in his fingers like ribbons.

"What happened in the throne room shouldn't have happened at all. My magic flows from the Odinforce, it shouldn't have been able to counter Gungnir." Loki really had things to do. He couldn't continue to speak in riddles.

Time flowed slower in Asgard than it did on Midgard and he still had to secure the Tesseract.

"Yggdrasil is sentient, it is not simple magical power source like the Astral Plane." Frigga led and Loki had no choice but to scrunch his nose. Sentient? Loki noticed Rin turn her head over at the conversation.

"You're saying Yggdrasil has its own mind?" Loki stepped back, surveying his mother's illusion.

"This is a topic best broached by Odin, perhaps you should ask him." Frigga's eyes shone like stars and her warm smile lit her face. Oh. Like that would happen. Loki knew what his mother was scheming but that relationship was beyond repair, and Loki preferred it that way.

A latent, dull anger remained in him that still made calves and hamstrings tighten. He held onto the resentment that he was never told he was a Frost Giant, not even by Frigga. He didn't suspect this festering anger would ever truly vanish, but Loki shelved his anger, for once.

He couldn't abide a man who betrayed him so, who used him so. The Other had at least been upfront with his intentions. Even Odin promised he would be a fairly treated prisoner, which was of course was not the case.

Loki's eyes glazed over in memory. The guards held him down even though they didn't really need to. He had no magic to spare. He had been leeching what little magic wasn't dampened by his cell into his concealed crystals to fuel one a long-range teleportation spell. In other words, he was defenseless.
The Aesir had always been naturally stronger than he, of course now he knew why.

They didn't want him merely beaten, no. They wanted him to submit in various ways, with various acts. Endured he did, and he had thought about hunting the individuals down and slitting their throats but thought against it. Loki relished revenge, but to seek out those deviant sadists would interfere with the greater vengeance against the Other. Plus, if he sought them out to kill them it would give weight to what they did to him, and he didn't want that.

After all, a weapon doesn't feel shame.

"Not to interrupt Queen Frigga, but, do you think that Odin will allow us to see Heimdall? A ruler such as he has to understand the severity of the threat we all face. Thor even advised us that Thanos and the Other are feared even here in Asgard." Romanoff's voice fell soft but heavy. Frigga's illusion turned and regarded her with eyes hopeful.

"Our Allfather is not usually so agitated. Thor and Fandral are reasoning with him now. I have informed him of what I saw on Midgard, I believe he will agree for you all to see Heimdall, but on what terms I am unsure." Frigga admitted, a small smile gracing her elegant features.

Loki balked in surprise at Fandral coming to his assistance, but he was ever the most reasonable one of the four. It would make things easier since no doubt Allfather knew Thor had a soft spot for his adopted younger brother.

"Good, Thor and Fandral together should prove effective. Rin had a definite emotional impact on Odin. He became angry because he genuinely liked her and the thought of her using him provoked an outburst. I am sure Odin will comply and on acceptable terms." Romanoff remained sure and poised. Loki absently wondered what 'acceptable terms' meant to the assassin. Frigga laughed softly, as if understanding a joke he didn't.

'I am not as certain Odin will listen to reason, yet no matter the outcome he should allow Rin and Romanoff to return to Midgard. Romanoff shouldn't worry about 'acceptable terms'. Thor along with Sesshomaru will be enough to thwart the Mad Titan if Odin wants to unleash the full wrath of the Odinforce upon me. Though, I did manage to stop him in the throne room which was somewhat amusing.' Loki scrunched his nose.

"Queen Frigga I drew you while you were talking with Uncle Loki." Rin announced with glee and Frigga bent down a bit. Rin ran up to present her the picture. She also drew Romanoff kicking Volstagg, Hogun and Sif, but both Frigga and Loki advised her to hide those.

It was time.

"Mother, where is the Tesseract?" Loki's voice sounded hard as granite. Frigga pursed her lips and Rin whipped her pony-tailed head around, attention piqued. Romanoff also turned to him, but to her credit she had a practiced disinterested look printed on her facial features.

"Loki." Frigga stated simply, he knew what she feared. She just now had reconstructed the fractured trust they had between them. While it was unfair to test it so soon, but it had to be done. The Tesseract was his possession. He collected it and he was the only person he trusted with it. He certainly didn't trust Odin with one of the Infinity Gems, especially one that could potentially create a gateway to the Astral Plane.

Asgard with the power of the Astral Plane and the Odinforce? Not while he stood.

"Mother. It is mine." Loki insisted. She had to understand that it was his responsibility and while
he allowed Odin to borrow it; it was time he reclaimed it. Asgard had become indolent in its security of its prized items. Loki would know, he did have in his possession a certain Casket of Ancient Winters. He kept it because while he had no love lost for Laufey, the Frost Giants had indeed been subdued and conquered by Odin. Loki knew how it felt to be humiliated, stripped down and forced to kneel, mouth open to the dominion of Asgard's finest.

It also represented a suitable bargaining chip for his life if he was turned over to Jotunheim in the next hour.

"It's in the vault, where the Casket of Ancient Winters used to be." Frigga relented, her arched eyebrows slanted across her regal face. An intentional barb, of course Frigga would know he most likely retained the Jotunheim relic. Loki recognized passive aggression, he operated with it commonly. All the sudden a white hot wave of possessiveness roiled within him and his eyes darkened.

"The Casket had no right to be within the halls of Asgard! It is mine by divine right! It belongs with the Frost Giants, not with Odin who dominated them so. Now that Laufey has fallen, as his son, his only heir, the King of Monsters, it is my responsibility to..." Loki trailed off, his normally quicksilver tongue had gotten ahead of him. He had momentarily forgotten that he was not alone in the room with only his mother's illusion. Loki's eyes locked onto Romanoff's narrowed blue ones.

"Oh, don't mind us lowly mortals, your highness." Romanoff's full lips quirked up into a mocking smirk. Of course, mortals didn't know of the reputation of the Frost Giants.

"Why didn't you tell us you were a king, Uncle Loki? Do you not like being king? Sometimes I think Lord Sesshomaru doesn't like being a lord, he is hardly ever at his castle." Rin skipped up to Loki, grabbing the tail of his robe scrutinizing him as if seeing him in a new light.

"It definitely seems like something you'd flaunt, we've seen you on one of your power trips. Does Thor know?" Romanoff continued and Loki rubbed his temple, rolling his eyes.

"I do not want that frigid throne." Loki snorted. "I do not believe Thor had ever thought my lineage in such a way. The Aesir would not approve if I took such a throne even if it was welcomed by Jotunheim." Loki's green eyes sparkled in sudden devilry. They had heard this much, may as well continue. Rin and Romanoff held their ground as Loki's magic spiked out from his hands.

"I am Jotun. A Frost Giant. Frost Giants are the monsters of Asgard. They exist as evils in their fairy tales, the savages in their war stories, and the most sincere horror in the Nine Realms. I am heir to their throne." Loki grinned wickedly. Oh, wouldn't that just be the fly in Odin's ointment if circumstances were different and he was still truly Loki and not the Broken Blade the Other forged. Loki indulged himself in a half-imagined day dream of seeing Odin's head spin as he crossed his blue skinned legs on the icy throne of Jotunheim. He'd keep the horned helm and his preferred shade of viridian green.

Alas, such a dream would certainly not come to pass, even if he didn't that particular throne, the thirst of power be on equal footing with Odin made Loki's mouth water.

"Loki, do not speak such of yourself. I trust the Allfather's judgment in keeping that relic. It prevents full scale war, I will not have you question such measures. It would be good to have it returned." Frigga's voice flatlined in a stern tone and Loki sighed. Strategically, it was a good maneuver. Loki calmed his magic and refocused.

"Mother, I going to see to the Tesseract. If Asgard could so easily misplace the Casket of Ancient Winters, it most assuredly could lose the more powerful Tesseract to the Mad Titan. It is my
responsibility that I left in Asgard's inept hands." Loki replied to his mother, explaining his actions as he coiled the green magic around him to teleport to the vault before anyone could stop him. He was sure to leave an indiscernible illusion of himself in his quarters.

Loki found himself cloaked in silence and the cerulean blue light of the Tesseract. The darkened vault remained cold even without the Casket within it, almost as if it remembered what it was like to have it. Loki slowly approached the finest gem he had ever come to possess. It was now or never, this was his only window of time with Odin distracted enough to not feel his residual magic in the frigid vault.

Not that he truly felt the cold.

"Uncle Loki, are you going to take back your Tesseract?" Rin's innocent question caused Loki jump out of his skin. She had the tails of his black and green robe in her hands.

She...she stowed away in his teleportation spell!

"Rin! You! Shhhh!" He silenced Rin with a hand over her mouth. Her lips already cool beneath his touch it'd be too risky to send her back now. "You should not have done such a thing. Magic is dangerous." Loki lowly warned, if only half of her were teleported...well, Odin would be eating his organs.

"You shouldn't be alone Uncle Loki. And Rin wanted to see the Tesseract!" Rin whispered, smiling brightly. Loki blinked. Why would she care over such a thing?

"So, are you going to take your Tesseract back? It's important to you right Uncle Loki?" Rin pushed and Loki furrowed his brow. It was important to him. He had spent a good portion of his life finding where some of the Infinity Gems were located. The mortals had rediscovered the Tesseract, and he allowed him to play with it for a while. He had located the Ether, but that was far too perilous to collect. The Soul Gem alluded him, though Loki was sure it was still tucked away on Midgard somewhere, another reason the Mad Titan could not be allowed to conquer the planet.

"It is important, but if I simply removed it, Odin would know." Loki pursed his lips, Odin had added better spells in the past few years. The substantial power going missing from the vault would alert Odin. The spelled vaults would know if all of the sudden there was such a vast disparity in energy.

Unless it was replaced with something of near equivalent power.

Loki's thoughts spun to the Casket of Ancient Winters, he could cast an illusion spell and it could easily be disguised as the Tesseract until someone were to try to touch it. They even looked similar.

Would he really give such a significant relic back to Odin? The Casket was so entrenched in everything that he used to be. It represented everything that caused his fall, his imprisonment, the failed invasion, Asgard's cell, Thor's rejection, Frigga's tears, Odin's sentence, Sesshomaru's return.

"And Odin would hurt you again if he found out you took it?" Rin asked softly, biting her lip. The girl could be too perceptive, Romanoff's protégé was a good role for her.

"I don't allow anyone to hurt me Rin." Loki whispered back, deep in thought. His blood surged through his veins at the thought of Odin having the Casket returned to him. But, Loki surmised only he himself could keep the Tesseract absolutely safe. His thoughts flashed to Clint when he stood over him in the sparring room, that artist Kanye West's music blaring words he could never say.
'I aint loving you the way I wanted to. What I had to do, had to run from you.'

Loki could eat Clint with a spoon with such passionate relish. The Nines, he'd go to war with just a spoon for that archer.

And yet here he was debating if swapping his Infinity Gem that could doom their realms for a relic from his past was the correct choice. He wasn't right in the head. He knew that. He did. There was little good in him, it was why he was debating it in the first place: the safety of the few he cared for or a hardened notion of spite and a race that wanted his head on a spike.

Well, not that many Midgardian mortals didn't wish for the same for Loki. But Loki didn't fight for the squalling masses of mortals. That was Thor's mantle.

"That's not true. Barton hurt you, you let him." Rin wagged a finger and Loki knew she was right. He had forgotten about the arrows but something in Rin's voice suggested that might not be what she was referencing.

"I am not going to argue with a child, not even you dear Rin." Loki forced himself to concentrate, if he recalled correctly the guards would do another sweep in one hundred seconds so he had to act fast. He also knew Odin's attentions could only be distracted by Thor, Fandral, and his mother but for so long.

Tesseract or Casket? Which would he relinquish to Odin? His future, or lack thereof, or his past his heritage and a symbol of Odin's warmongering? Could he really just let go of all that resentment, of all of that and give back to Odin not only what never truly belonged to him, but what he also never deserved? Not that he deserved an Infinity Gem either.

If he traded them now, he wouldn't get the chance to exchange them again before he died.

For once, why couldn't he have both?

With a wave of his hand a portal opened to one of his more deftly hidden dimensional pockets. He gingerly reached in and a relieving chill spread through his body as he clutched the handles of the Casket. He hesitated again, Odin's glamour faltered just like it did when he was on the Bifrost with Heimdall.

His skin turned blue, he knew theoretically his eyes were now fully red, and his face had raised lines just like his hands did, but he had never seen his reflection. Only when he touched the Casket did this form freely show, and his gut sank, Rin's brown eyes looked upon him.

"You see Rin, I'm the King of Monsters." Loki announced and Rin laughed despite her goose-pimpled skin, her breath puffed visibly in the air.

"You're ashamed of your true form Uncle Loki? Your form is a whole lot less scary than my Lord's, even Jaken's! I am not scared of my Lord when he changes, Jaken isn't either because he is still our Lord Sesshomaru, so why should I be scared of you?" Rin shivered but the smile never left her face. "Humans think all Demons are monsters, but my Lord knows they are just cowardly weaklings with no sense. I think that Lord Sesshomaru would feel the same about the people here." Rin hopped up and down to deter the cold and Loki chuckled.

He had forgotten that she would see his Jotun form as equivalent to Sesshomaru's true form. He could debate his skin could give her frostbite, but Sho did have his toxin. He couldn't deny the truth to her words, the Aesir certainly feared anything that didn't look like them, and would certainly shirk in fright if he showed his blue skin in public. Why did he let it rule him? Why did
"You lack good sense child." He glanced down at the Casket and made the only choice he could, and Rin beamed in approval. He quickly teleported them both back to his old quarters to a tense, rigid shouldered Romanoff who immediately struck him in the temple with her charged baton.

The Norns! That hurt!

"Wench! I did not mean for Rin to abscond with me!" Loki hissed, vision black at the corner of his left eye and his whole body twitched from the electric charge. He didn't even realize he had been kneeling the blow caught him that off guard. He went to prevent a second strike when he saw his hands were still blue and lined all the way up to his mid-arms.

She swung the baton again at the insult and he caught it, frost instantly graced its surface despite the electrical charge. She eyed it then him and a flicker of recognition darted in her blue eyes as she relaxed and he released his grip on the baton.

"Whatever you did Glow Stick, it'd better be worth it." Romanoff said slowly and collapsed the baton and looked over Rin as a superior officer would a trainee.

"I concur." Loki put a hand to his temple, willing his vision to come back unperturbed and his skin to return to its proper color and texture. She was highly effective alright. The electric shock of the baton shook his daydreams out of his head and replaced them with something dark.

A dark, brewing foreboding cloud shaded his thoughts. His magic spiraled like a whirlpool inside him in great discord. Something was afoot, he could sense something was not right. There was an insatiable thirst, a clawing urge to return to Midgard immediately. There was no way Midgard could befall an attack, despite what he told Stark. Sesshomaru being on Midgard was simply an unnecessary precaution. Right?

Acid still churned in his gut like ravenous eels.

Loki snarled like a caged dragon, he had so much power, and so little means to use it. If anything befell Clint while he sat in his room like a scolded child, Odin would face his vengeance. No. Asgard would face his vengeance. The entire realm, he would plunder it and not even Thor nor Frigga could stop him. His jaw clenched, a fiery rage looped through his body. He would pluck out Odin's remaining eye and give it to Thor if Clint suffered at the hands of his enemy while Odin hemmed and hawed.

On cue, Thor burst through the carved double doors with Frigga, weary but jubilant.

"Brother! Odin has allowed us to seek Heimdall's eyes! He has but two stipulations!" Thor threw his bulging arms around Loki before he could protest. Thor held him dearly like a babe would a doll. Loki stiffened, trying to pry himself away from his brother, finally managing to do so. Loki was going to kill him. He was going to kill Thor.

Romanoff had already snapped a photo and Loki fought the urge to magic the device away.

Rin then gave Thor a high five. Everyone was against him!

"What does Odin require of me he hasn't already taken?" Loki replied blandly, dusting non-existent dust from himself after the crushing embrace.

"One is conditional upon the other. If the Chitauri fleet is indeed headed towards Midgard as you allege, you cannot return to Asgard until we have defeated the threat, or he will turn you over to
Jotunheim." Thor reported painfully and Loki scoffed.

'I didn't want to return here in the first place anyway. It is also unsurprising he would turn me over to Jotunheim. My crimes against them are greater than Midgard. They do not look kindly on regicide nor patricide I'd presume, even if I am technically heir to their throne.' Loki put his hand on his hip, looking out his window, knowing this would be the last time he would see this view of his reading gardens. He would never return to Asgard, and it didn't bother him as much as he thought it would.

"That is acceptable. Which is the other?" Loki tensed and clenched his fists thinking of the one thing Odin would want. Something important to him that he could obtain...some sort of poetic justice....Oh.

'Thor, please not say he wants Sho's head or his sword. Sesshomaru will certainly not part willingly with Tenseiga, and the battle between the two that would ensue would certainly drive a wedge between the realms. Midgard's heroes would certainly not take to him being slain, I would be forced to take up arms against Odin, Thor would undoubtedly take Odin's side...' Loki calculated the predicted fallout, fearing the worst in Thor's sky blue eyes.

"He would like the picture Lady Rin drew for him." Loki's jaw slackened and all the rocky, knotted muscles in his body loosened one section at a time. Rin jumped in delight, running to go get her artwork.

They...succeeded? Loki stood shell-shocked, he wasn't used to winning.

"Objective complete Rin. You just won me fifty bucks off your Uncle Clint." Romanoff flashed a knowing smile Loki's direction. Loki paled, the bow and arrow motion and now this. She somehow knew!

'Oh no. This doesn't bode well. She couldn't possibly know of my affections for him! I rather cherish our limited time together and she will certainly sabotage it. She is indeed a valuable ally. I mustn't befall any situation in which she may resort to blackmail. She could tell Clint my true heritage! She could tell him the exact abomination I am.' Loki ran a trembling hand through his hair to calm it. Loki's green eyes unfocused off in the distance a new spike of dread shooting through him. He had to return to Midgard now.

"Thanks Natasha, it was Lord Sesshomaru's idea. He said that Odin would be vulnerable to familial emotional sentiment!" Romanoff then high fived Rin the hand Rin put up and she saluted.

Frigga chuckled at Rin's quotation of Sho's tactic.

"Thor, your suspenseful declarations will be the very end of me. Let's be off, I loathe rotting in this room a moment further." Loki let shine a fake, vibrant smile as Rin handed him the folded piece of art paper.

"Aye, Odin requires your presence before him before we depart for Heimdall. Worry not dear brother, I will escort you to the doors, and I shall only be on the other side of them." Loki pursed his lips, he didn't need nor want Thor's protection.

"I shan't require aid. Watch over Rin and try to not let Volstagg, Hogun nor Sif antagonize Romanoff, I'd rather not explain to Odin how his prized warriors were bested by a mortal woman and child." Loki quirked a devilish grin and Romanoff rolled her eyes as if to say 'flattery will get you nowhere'.
"I would have to concur. They are quite formidable. Fandral has placated Sif and Hogun some, but they believe you scheme." Thor admitted with an edge of hurt. What a naïve oaf.

"Oh, indeed brother I conjure many a scheme, just none to which Asgard nor Midgard will be a victim. Inform Fandral he has my gratitude." Loki glamored on his armor, he was off to war. He strode purposefully out the door when Romanoff grabbed him suddenly. The action caught him off guard, she was never this direct nor close with him before.

"I trusted your judgment on this. You can trust my discretion." Romanoff read his mind. Since when did they come to some sort of mutual trusting partnership? This was obscene.

"This is dangerous territory for beings such as us." Loki narrowed his eyes, not catching anything ingenuine in Romanoff’s stance.

"Less dangerous than a galaxy conquering War Titan, a sorcerer who can curse people light-years away, and spaceships than can turn our planet into dust?" Romanoff challenged back.

"You're wiser than this, dear Spider." Loki chided lowly as he put on his horned helm and left her in the foyer. The mortals getting too close to him was a slippery slope. Loki knew this to be true, but he could have rebuffed her more harshly.

He could have burned the bridge slowly building between him and his billiards partner. But he didn't, in fact he knew she wouldn't tell Clint about his hands, about his throne, unless of course he forced her hand. Did he trust her? He was wiser than tha…

Frigga apparated, this time in person, in the marbled east corridor with him.

"My son, please, take great care. You and your friends are both intrepid and intelligent, I recall now how bright and talented Sesshomaru was, yet the Mad Titan and the Other are most formidable. I can't... I simply can't... My dear Loki...ple-" Loki pressed a finger to his mother's shaking lips.

"They won't ever own me again. I will regain my honor and redeem my name. I vow to shield our realms and bring ruin to our enemies. And while I shoulder vast responsibility, I wield a more colossal strength than ever before. I possess people to protect and should I fall, fear not my mother, for Thor and Sesshomaru will finish what I started. Albeit I have not known much in the way of luck nor good fortune, I would strive to await you in Valhalla." Loki felt his chest clench, but his eyes remained clear. Frigga swallowed and kissed his cheek.

Loki would not tell his mother that this would be the last time they saw each other. He did hope, however, when he succeeded in slaying the Other, he would one day see his mother in Valhalla.

Loki found himself at Odin's throne room before he knew what actually transpired.

"Loki, you have conspired me into bringing forth a Demon Lord from the past, cajoled me into breaking Asgardian law and now impose upon me the gall to request more of a strained Heimdall. If this invasion, this armada, is some farce, you will receive no mercy nor preferred treatment. I will relinquish you to Jotunheim." Odin warned, standing tall with Gungnir. Loki swallowed, even though he was certain of the invasion, the promise to send him shackled like some sow to Jotunheim didn't particularly please him.

Loki wished to say something grandiose and verbose, however, instead he took a page from Sesshomaru's book and instead handed him Rin's drawing wordlessly.

Odin's disbelief in lack of a grand retort was palpable as he took the drawing. Odin folded the
paper in his hand, lone eye lolling over its markings. Then, in a fraction of an instant, he speared forth Gungnir at Loki with a great stream of dazzling magic at its tip.

Loki’s blood ran icy like his Jotun heritage.

He should have seen the attack coming. Really. He should have teleported, or conjured his own spear. Instead, his training blanked on him and he only had the instinct to throw out a quick, underpowered forcefield. Loki cursed himself looking so taken off guard in front of his former father. He cursed himself it would end like this.

He cursed himself the last thing he would see was Odin's disapproving eye.

Loki’s lips rippled into a grimace. Gungnir would easily impale through the weak protection and skewer him through. The thought that he never got to ravage Clint's body with his tongue flashed through his head. Not the invasion, not the Other, just Clint. Clint with his roguish, tussled hair, his toned body, discerning eyes, yet open heart. Loki was indeed selfish through and through.

A spike of despair ruptured his lungs, he'd never get to see that wide-eyed caught off guard expression again. It wasn't fair! This wasn't the death he wanted! Clint!

Gungnir pierced his armor, then his chest and Loki closed his eyes and sucked in his last breath of air.

But the great blade advanced no further. Loki opened a green eye.

Only a couple inches of Gungnir's great blade had ruptured through his armor and between his ribs. A great, green cedar tree had slowed Gungnir's impact and shifted its shaft at an angle to miss his heart. Gungnir stuck through the trunk of the tree like an arrow through a training target. He lived.

Loki's lungs remained trapped in a cold cage as shock spread through his veins, it happened again!

"So, it is true. One of Yggdrasil's branches has chosen you as a vessel." Odin murmured as he powered down Gungnir's blade and the cedar tree and the magic instantly vanished.

Loki simmered and warmed with incandescent ire.

"You dare?! You test Yggdrasil in this way? You are mad! You are without sense!" Loki chipped out, mirroring Rin's earlier words. His jaw strained and fists clenched as he volleyed a bolt of magic at Odin which ricocheted off Gungnir at an odd angle. Loki ignored the blood dribbling down his chest, soaking into his armor.

"Without sense am I? You hold that forked tongue of yours. I have the mind to renege on my generous offer and send you to Jotunheim now. The branch of Midgard may have chosen you as a vessel for its magic over me but do not be so foolish to think it is near enough to defeat me Loki." Odin replied loftily, stamping Gungnir on the throne room floor with a clang.

Loki's thoughts blanked out. One of the two realms he ravaged, the other being Jotunheim, chose him as a vessel for its magic? Over Odin? It even challenged the other branches?

Yggdrasil had that capability? What precisely did it even mean?

"Surely if the branch of Midgard has chosen me as a vessel for its magic, then it proves that Midgard needs me. You'd risk the realm your son loves so dearly for your own sensitive ego? You'd risk the safety of Asgard?" Loki's lips sliced into a challenging smile, devoid of warmth.
Odin's eye flashed.

"You fell from the Bifrost, but it seems your arrogance is still quite intact. Midgard does not need you as its guardian nor champion." Odin lowered his chin.

Loki couldn't help himself, he shapeshifted into Thor, billowing cape, blond hair and all.

"Allfather, would you risk the realm I love, the mortal Jane I love so dearly on such bold a claim? Midgard can use all the hands it needs to stave off against such a mighty foe!" Loki gestured the best he could as Thor, amusing himself. Odin caught him off guard, it was time to return the favor. Odin would always have a blind spot for Thor, just like Frigga had for himself. He really should have shapeshifted into Thor before all of this. Loki could just imagine the blood pressure rising in Odin's arteries.

"Your childish antics are a disservice to all who know you." Odin responded darkly and Loki simply cackled in response.

If only Odin truly knew.

"I have never been very fond of servitude. As much as I do love our chats, wouldn't you want to see if you need to ready my shackles and muzzle?" Loki shape shifted back, sans helm, blood still staining his armor as he strained to heal his wound against Gungnir's magic. It would be a slow healing process, it'd probably even scar, but it didn't really hurt.

Odin nodded. Together they held a tense, awkward silence as they strode towards the awaiting Thor, Rin, Romanoff along with the Warriors Three and Sif.

Loki could tell by the panicked, incredulous look on Thor's face that he saw his wound and Loki made a frenzied motion to not mention it. Romanoff put a hand on his shoulder, knuckles white face blank. Rin scowled. Loki smiled reassuringly, Frigga understood.

They made an odd bunch all walking together across the faded Bifrost towards Heimdall. Rin still swung her bone through in the air as if attacking an invisible foe.

Loki swallowed thickly, the eels in his gut thrashed and sliced; he knew he must look pale. Loki had great confidence in the location of the Mad Titan's armada. He knew the Aethon and the Nycteus were the fastest of his fleet. Followed by the odd destroyer, the Worldslyer. He had never seen the Worldslyer in person, but had seen its images when aboard The Relentless. Loki had scrutinized and calculated the most efficient route the Other would have to take to reach Midgard. The foreboding feeling that not all was well on Midgard rendered him shaky.

Loki, with as extreme precision as Clint's aim, put them just inside the Canis Major Dwarf Galaxy, near the star Sirius, 8.6 light-years away. He didn't return to Asgard to convince himself, he returned to convince others.

Then why did he feel such awful trepidation?

Before he knew it, he was before Heimdall.

"Heimdall, it has been many a Midgardian moon since we have been on civil terms, however, I, we, must entreat you. We must know the placement of the Mad Titan's Navy. He means to strike and ravage both Midgard and Asgard. I am aware I placed a great strain on you and Odin summoning the Lord of Demons and the Western Lands to this time-space but I implore you, it was for a most dire reason." Loki, ever the silver-tongue heard the words spill from his mouth without hardly thinking them.
Heimdall turned, rolled his great shoulders, and huffed good-naturedly.

"Ever long-winded you are Loki. Here lies the bulk of your supposed fleet." With a blur of lapis and pink cosmos, Heimdall revealed the fleet. Loki subconsciously mouthed their names: 'The Umbra', 'The Voracious', 'The Relentless', 'The Worldslayer' and lastly 'The Aethon', and 'The Nycteus'.

But they were nowhere near Sirius, they were well past Proxima Centauri, Loki put the fleet at merely one light-year out.

'Perhaps they made up time around the Sagittarius dwarf Galaxy?! No. Loki recalled the Other's experiments on his magic. He had to have imbued his magic to their engines to increase their output. There was no changing it now. There was still time, perhaps two Midgardian weeks.' Loki sighed in relief just slightly. Romanoff was busy recording the image.

"Grand. Exactly where I knew them to be." Loki lied smoothly. "The Aethon, their fastest, leads them. They will reach Midgardian space in two weeks' time." Loki's eyes danced, reflecting the stars and cosmos. It was truly a shame the Kree saw this sector of this galaxy as too backwater for them to aid in their defense.

"Only two weeks brother didn't you say be—" Romanoff silenced Thor with an elbow to his side. She was talented.

"It exists! The fabled fleet! You were serious!" Sif gasped. Rin next to her put her hands on her hips as if to scold her.

"How dare this Mad Titan try to threaten Asgard and Midgard!" Volstagg craggily pointed.

"We owe you an apology Loki..." Hogun stared breathlessly at the image.

Loki, for the first time in a long time, felt vindicated. While it was quite lovely to feel listened to by the Aesir for once, he no longer found himself longing for their approval. Maybe Rin's little speech hit home. Loki rose above them, he was indeed over Asgard and their opinions of him. Let them think what they will of him, it's not like he would see them again anyway.

"However, Loki, a Darkvoid Interceptor from their fleet entered the atmosphere of Midgard four Midgardian hours past." Heimdall's deep baritone voice dropped an octave along with Loki's heart. Loki jumped, his instincts had been spot on, something awful is indeed afoot. A jagged lance of panic stabbed his gut, the acid brewing.

'It cannot be! They had no such vessels capable of that velocity in their possession before! 'A Darkvoid Interceptor is a small but agile cruiser. It has considerable artillery and viability! She also cannot be destroyed easily due to a reinforced armored hull. I know helicarriers SHIELD employs can't defeat it easily. Why would the Mad Titan show his hand in this way? Why send this one ship ahead to alert them when they had the advantage of surprise? For what gain?!' Loki's dark green and black magic snaked around him unconsciously.

"Darkvoid Interceptor? Loki, could the helicarriers stave it off?" Romanoff inquired but Loki ignored her.

'Clint. Sesshomaru. Both would no doubt try to engage it directly. I have to believe them to be well. There is no other option. Clint owes me a wager after all. He cannot fall before I collect it.' Loki rocked back on his heels. He didn't replace his special protective spell on Clint before he left! What folly!
"Where is it now Heimdall?" Loki's throat closed and his panic roused similar reactions in Thor and the other Aesir. Romanoff and Rin remained calm, however now attentive.

"It entered a space on Midgard that is blinded to me by a barrier. It has not left." Heimdall admitted. Just as he said that the fleet that was just once visible also vanished.

Loki's mind fragmented. New York.

'Sesshomaru's proximity barrier may have given them enough warning, yet I know not if it would remain if he were slain. I must believe he lives. I must believe Clint lives. I cannot panic here.' Loki attempted to relax and licked his lips steadying himself.

"Where did the main fleet go friend Heimdall?!" Thor inquired, now agitated. Loki figured Thor knew him well enough to pick up on his hidden panic.

"It seems they sensed my gaze upon them and shielded themselves from myself similarly to the barrier on Midgard." Heimdall informed but it mattered not to Loki. They got the answers they needed and now SHIELD did not need any more proof due to the Interceptor.

"We must return to Midgard. That interceptor is not to be trifled with. The city is in great jeopardy." Loki found his voice and Rin scampered behind him followed by Romanoff and Thor.

"It's OK Uncle Loki! Lord Sesshomaru, Stark, and Uncle Clint are there!" Rin reassured. Loki nodded. Yes, they were, and that's why he was nervous. Sesshomaru could be blindly reckless when faced with a challenge and Clint would fight to the last man. Stark would also no doubt attempt some splashy display of his weaponry to spark Sesshomaru's competitive spirit.

"Yeah, Pretty Boy hasn't disappointed us yet, and I know Uncle Clint wouldn't let my stuff get destroyed before I got back." Romanoff, that blasted woman! Thor will catch on! He is not that dense!

"You refer to both Loki and Clint as Uncle to Rin, is this another Midgardian custom to which I am not privy?" Thor inquired and Loki immediately started swirling his green and black magic in the same ring be made on the helipad of Stark Tower.

"Not now Thor!" Loki snapped, but it held no venom, just anxiety.

'Stark Tower better still stand.' Loki furrowed his brow in concentration. He caught Heimdall's eyes inadvertently when he summoned his magic ring, and Loki could have sworn Heimdall knew that this was final goodbye. Heimdall saw all; he was no one's fool.

Loki imagined a crumbling city in flames, cratered roads, crying mortals, and euphoric Chitauri seeking and destroying everything in their path. He knew their ways intimately.

As the ring constructed around them he could barely make out the words Odin called out.

"Go forth and conquer my sons." However, he knew he must have misheard Odin, he must have said son. Loki shook his head, forcing himself to focus.

The cosmos circled as a vortex once more and Loki prepared himself for mayhem.

What he didn't prepare himself for was teleporting right in front Rogers who was sitting next to the Quinjet eating what appeared to be a bowl of gruel.

"Good, you're just in time! Fury told Clint that he would come by in an hour. Oh, Natasha it'd be
smart to talk to him first, Clint didn't tell him where you actually were. Are you hungry? Want some?" Steve extended the large bowl and Loki's facial expression became the epitome of 'you've got to be kidding me.'

"What!? By the Nines no I do not want your fattening tuber gruel!" Loki exploded, looking around sensing everything being relatively peaceful. Where was the Interceptor?! The Chitauri? Had he gone mad?

"Aye Captain I am famished!" Thor passed Loki and grabbed the fork from Rogers.

"Steve, status report. Heimdall showed us there was an enemy bogey inbound to these coordinates four hours ago." Romanoff's voice sounded no nonsense as she also took the fork from Thor and took a bite of the potato salad.

What is with these mortals?!

"No casualties except property damage. Sesshomaru, as Clint says, 'death starred' the spaceship from the torch of the Statue of Liberty. Channel 8's Chopper Dave, 'the traffic eye for the regular guy', has a pretty good video of it. Clint TiVoed it, along with like thirteen Robert Downey Jr and demonic possession movies. Oh, Clint got hit by a Chitauri ray blast on the shoulder but seems to be in pretty good shape." Steve summarized and took back the fork. Loki frowned, so Clint did get injured. He would have to treat the wound and see it wouldn't happen again.

"Sounds good. I'll finally get to see Pretty Boy in action." Romanoff beat Thor to the fork and took a large bite triumphantly. Thor scowled.

Loki looked back in the direction of the Statue of Liberty and true enough there were two helicarriers in the distance hovering above the mouth of the Hudson river.

"Told you my Lord Sesshomaru would win against that bantha fodder! I'm gonna go show him my picture of the distant realm!" Rin ran off like a dervish. Bantha Fodder? Wasn't that a line from the Star Wars movie?

"Sesshomaru performed what feat exactly?! And what do you mean by Clint being in 'pretty good' shape. Define 'seems'." Loki, exasperated finally found his voice. He had to find Clint after this and heal him, but first he had to know exactly how Sesshomaru single handedly took out a ship like an Interceptor and remained unharmed. He didn't possess that power the last time he saw him.

"Clint says it just winged him. Sesshomaru though shot the ship down with one of his swords. Tony called it Backstreet Boy, but that's not its real name. He also...ahem took out a bunch of the Chitauri in Central Park. He beheaded one with his bare hands and then threw the head at another. Oh, and he did it all wearing a Nirvana T-shirt, which is a band I am supposed to listen to, and now the free-world thinks he is the new Avenger 'Mr Nirvana'. He also almost cut Tony in half with his other sword, but apparently, it can only cut Demon ghosts and furniture. Natasha, Sesshomaru did destroy a jet on the runway of one of the helicarriers after they tried to order him around and Fury said it would come of your pay. You guys really didn't miss much." Rogers added purposefully nonchalantly. Romanoff snorted in laughter at the threat and Thor seized the opportunity to take back the fork.

Loki blinked. He was gone just thirty-nine hours and Sesshomaru had gone and created a spectacle of himself. It was almost too much to process.

"Son of Taisho becoming an Avenger is a tremendous victory! I must see to congratulate him for this glorious occasion! I must find mead!" With a final forkful of potato salad, he returned the
utensil and set off down the roof access with strident purpose, probably planning to hug the unsuspecting Demon.

"Don't worry Glow Stick, this will all work out, we just need to make sure Fury doesn't have a pulmonary embolism when he sees you...are you sure you don't want any of this fattening tuber gruel? Clint made it." Romanoff winked and Loki let loose a few orbs of green magic in pure frustration.

By the nines, what had he gotten himself into?!

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay in this chapter coming out, I had company visiting and I had a lot to get out in this chapter. WHEW.

Loki is back! How will he deal with his budding friendship with Natasha? Does Loki have the tesseract or the casket? How will Clint 'welcome' Loki back? What will Fury have to say to our dear Demon Lord? What is all of this business with the Astral Plane and the Branches of Yggdrasil anyway?! You'll find out, I swear!!

Shout out to all my EPIC commentors, you guys truly do keep me writing. No. Lie! : Jennifer, Kitty_Grell_Laufeyson, kadja83, Allynora, Caitriona695, kyrreh, RavenNestling, legion11, Akuma River, Kumiko, and any and all guests!!!

-TL
Clint and the Scapegoat

Chapter Notes

I apologize (not really) for the length. I love Clint just too much.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Clint and the Scapegoat

*(*)

After toweling off and rebandaging his wounded shoulder, Clint huffed. He was done waiting. Being a bystander for Sesshomaru's game of 'red light, green smash' with the Hulk was a good diversion and all, but now he was fed up.

While Clint wanted to see what Fancy Pants had in store for Bruce, he also didn't have a death wish. Well, maybe he did because he went down there anyway.

Tony didn't come down to watch the Demon Lord get whipped around by the Hulk, much to the surprise of Clint. Though he probably was monitoring via Jarvis. Chicken.

"Banner. What do you think of your form?" Sesshomaru inquired, he stood about twenty-five feet from Bruce looking apathetic as ever. Clint monitored them on top of a partially melted crate tower; he did not need to hulked into Clint-jam.

"Um, well. It's pretty terrible. When the other guy ta-" Sesshomaru put up a clawed finger.

"You and your form are one." Sesshomaru corrected and he saw Bruce get a little edgy.

"No, he is the result of an experiment gone wrong. He's not me. He kills people, he destroyed Harlem, killed people, and almost killed Nat on the helicarrier." Bruce raked a hand through his hair and Clint second guessed his decision to watch this. He still thought it was for the best he didn't bring his bow; he didn't want to appear as a threat.

"How do you hope to control what you do not accept?" Sesshomaru remained relaxed, but his piercing stare lanced through Bruce.

'Can't say Fancy Pants doesn't have a point there. But how could he think they are the same people?' Clint asked himself as Bruce started to pace a bit.

"Accept?! You think I haven't accepted that this is me now? I have. My life is upended, I have to constantly be on the move, monitored by SHIELD. I'm seen as a constant threat. I'm a danger to innocents and I have to tip toe just to buy groceries. Trust me, I accept it, so spare me your judgments." Bruce's breath was labored now, Sesshomaru remained composed and haughty.

"You accept the consequences. Not the form." Fancy Pants corrected with a hint of arrogance.
"You're making it really, really hard for me to keep my composure. Is this really what you...had in mind?" Bruce began to writhe and Clint then thought his fate may just be between two slices of wonder bread.

'Super idea you had Clint. Let's go watch the Demon Lord purposely piss off the Hulk. What could possibly go wrong?' Clint patted himself down for any weapon and came up wanting.

Sesshomaru didn't respond, instead looked down at his nails like he just had them done.

"How...dare you look down on me? You couldn't possibly know what it is like to transform into something you have no control over! Something everyone fears, hates, and rejects!" Bruce began to change to a shade of green only found in the 1980's and Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed into razors.

'Oh sure, yeah, be purposely condescending. Sounds like a sound teaching technique. Trial by fire worked for Joan of Arc just fine.' Clint put a hand over his mouth, tense.

"I know... knew of someone who without a certain item would transform into something not unlike you." Sesshomaru stepped forward with an alligator booted foot, looking like he was about to strut down a runway, not about to get pasted by the Hulk.

Bruce, not quite the Hulk, paused.

"He had no hope to control his transformation nor form. His bloodlust would go unquenched until he was destroyed." Sesshomaru took another step forward, closing the gap. Clint had a feeling whoever Fancy Pants was talking about was someone close to him, his voice changed slightly.

'Unquenchable bloodlust is what I look for in friends too.' Clint smirked to himself.

"I would not have approved of this training if you were he. Do not wallow in your pathetic self-pity." Sesshomaru squared his shoulders and unleashed a wave of youki at the Hulk.

'My obituary will read: excellent archer, expert hunter, survived by people wondering 'just what the hell were you thinking? This is what I do waiting for Loki to come back? Really?' Clint fought the survivalist urge in him bolt, it would just attract the Hulk's attention. Clint watched the next few seconds like one would a train wreck.

Bruce shielded himself from the youki blast and his clothes shredded as his deafening roar echoed in the large storage room. His body stretched, grew, and bulked green. He wrenched his tree trunk neck to the ceiling, his boulder thick head head rolling to the sides.

The Hulk eyed the archer and changed course.

'Well this life was nice while it lasted. Still never got to see Tony's reaction to all those Robert Downey Jr movies I Tivo'd. I never go to rub that purple deer stuff in Loki's face. Someone else will have to if he gets back. When. When he gets back.' Clint's lungs constricted in panic knowing his exit was blocked by the Hulk. A cigar may have been poetic here.

The Hulk rampaged forward, arms flinging wildly. Sesshomaru darted so quickly to intercept the Hulk he left an afterimage. Fancy Pants barely evaded the Hulk grabbing his long hair to kite him away from Clint's crate tower.

'I'm officially a damsel in distress. First Tony picks me up like he would Pepper, then this. I should probably just give my man-card to Nat permanently.' Clint slowly and purposefully moved to the edge of the crate.
The Hulk crashed and tumbled after Sesshomaru and he in return would send out tiny sparks of Youki at him. If Clint didn't know any better, and he really didn't, he would say Fancy Pants had done this before.

'My name is Fancy Pants, my hobbies include decapitation, ribbon dancing, and taunting beings with out of control bloodlust. Serious replies only.' Clint slipped down one crate by one sneakily, ready to escape when noticed the deafening roars had dampened.

Clint chanced a peek.

'I can't believe it worked.' Clint was floored. The Hulk, now simply looked down at Sesshomaru. While Fancy Pants stood poised with his chin up in victory, his chest heaved from exertion. Sesshomaru must be beat. He did just blow up an alien death ship and successfully avoided getting even touched by the Hulk. Not even Thor or Loki had been that lucky against the green guy.

Clint stepped out from behind the crate tower. He hadn't seen Bruce so calm in Hulk form, not even during the battle three years ago.

"Smug Demon." Hulk grunted and Sesshomaru's eyes flashed bright.

"Heed my words Banner, the next time you attempt to grab this Sesshomaru's person I will not hold back." Sesshomaru tossed his hair back and flounced out of the room, leaving a recovering Bruce and a stunned Clint.

"Bruce. If you and Thor group hug Fancy Pants in front of Fury and I'll put that photo of Tony dressed in his kimono online." Clint offered and gave a thumbs up when the Hulk chuckled.

Maybe he'd put the photo up anyway out of boredom.

If this Heimdall guy was so good at seeing stuff why weren't Loki, Nat, Thor, and squirt back yet?

'Did Asgard actually something to Loki? Was Nat Ok? I can't stall Fury for much longer. No matter what I say, neither Fury, Coulson nor Hill believe me when I say I can't contact her. It's par for the course they don't believe a word I say, but now Fury really believes that the Sesshomaru he met before wasn't the real one. They're probably bringing my severance package to Stark tower with a bow on it.' Clint grumbled, putting on his worn out jeans.

'Loki better get his leather clad ass back so I can kick it for the trouble.' Clint checked his phone for the time, ignoring Fury's twenty-seven missed calls: 17:38.

"Lord Sesshomaru! Objective complete! Their all-seeing sentry showed us the ships! I also have a picture for you!" Rin's voice rang like a bell. Clint heard her rushed, padded steps through the common room and the abrupt skidding stop.

She probably ran right into Fancy Pants' legs for a hug. Big, bad, Demon Lord daddy must have missed squirt too if he let her do that.

Clint didn't uncoil from his tense unease. Why did he only hear Rin?

"Rin missed you, Lord Sesshomaru! Rogers told me you killed a Chitauri! Who's Chopper Dave? Why are the humans calling you Mr. Nirvana? Will these humans hunt you like the others in our time? Was the ship bigger than Ah-Un?" Rin cheerily chirped about a mile a minute. Clint
chuckled to himself, that was definitely too many questions for their favorite 'question allergic' Demon.

"Rin." He simply said. He was caught off guard by Rin's question about people hunting Fancy Pants down. Clint knew he was one of the best hunters, but they couldn't pay him enough to hunt down Sesshomaru, even before he liked the guy. Did people back then actually think they could?

"Sorry Lord Sesshomaru. Rin didn't like the Distant Realm, Odin got so angry! He atta— " Rin was cut off by a trouncing lumbering which could only belong to Thor. He just showered, and was going to shave, but curiosity got the better of him and he left to see what was going on.

"Son of Taisho! Captain Rogers has informed me you have successfully defended Midgard and joined Midgard's ranks as an Avenger! We must celebrate such victories!" Thor's 'football coach' voice projected so clearly Clint could have sworn he was in the bathroom with him.

He stepped out into the common room to see Thor awkwardly open his arms for a hug well within Fancy Pants' personal space bubble. Clint couldn't wait to see this.

Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and Clint swore his hair was standing higher than usual. Thor would have better luck trying to pet a feral cat.

"This Sesshomaru did not join your human consort. Do not touch my person, Storm God." Sesshomaru all but hissed. Poor Thor, unrequited love is so bittersweet. From behind Sesshomaru, Clint motioned for Thor to try to hug him anyway, his deal with Bruce might come true!

"Tis but warriors' revelry! No need for such a cool reception my friend, as I have said before I have no plans to court you!" Thor explained, raising his arms again and Clint laughed. Hard. If he had been drinking water he would've choked.

"I don't think Uncle Loki would like it if that happened Lord Sesshomaru." Rin said and Sesshomaru's ears raised. Clint then realized that Fancy Pants wasn't there for that particular admission. Avengers' HQ was beginning to feel like a terrible reality show.

" Plans? So, you've thought about it, big guy?" Clint tormented the both of them and the temperature plummeted in the room by a few degrees. Clint heard an approach from behind him, from the gait it had to be Tony.

" Plans? Nice to see half of the 'scamtastic four' are already down here." Tony stood next to Clint arms crossed, eyeing Sesshomaru.

"Our buddy Thor here was telling Fancy Pants here that he has no plans to date him, that he'd settle for just a warriors' hug. I'm not sure if I buy it since everyone wants a piece of Fancy Pants today." Clint grinned, knowing Tony loved a good innuendo joke. Thor crossed arms down, skin flushed. Sesshomaru sliced his eyes back to Clint lethally.

To Clint's surprise Tony didn't say anything, he just crossed his arms and studied Thor like one of his equations.

Ok, awkward and weird.

"I think it's about time we taught Weather Vane how to Skype Dr Foster. It's easier than the microwave." Tony finally said; Thor brightened. Rin hopped up and down giggling to herself, for the life of Clint he didn't know what was so funny.
Saving Clint from more awkwardness, a poof of green smoke plumed in the middle of room. Loki. He stood regally if not a little pale. Clint drank him in: his gelled black hair, his alert green eyes, busy fingers, long legs.

Clint relaxed instantaneously; he was here. It was about damn time.

"Stark Tower has doors you know." Clint couldn't help himself, he was in an infinitely better mood. Loki came back in one piece, and by what he suspected, Nat was up on the roof talking with Steve. Now Fury would believe him with Nat to back him up, no one else in SHIELD would.

"Some entrances require immmediacy, Clint." Loki quirked his lips up cryptically and Clint wasn't sure what to make of that. Clint never could quite understand how when Loki said his name, it sounded more like a spell than a word, like he tasted the syllable instead of just saying it.

"Loki, your metallic stench offends me. Rin go play, I will speak with you later." Sesshomaru announced and Loki rolled his eyes. Metallic? Loki never smelled that way.

"Yes, Lord Sesshomaru! I'm going to go show Jaken what I learned in the Distant Realm! I fought Storm God's friend and Natasha called me her protégé!" Rin smiled brightly and scampered off while Sesshomaru raised an eyebrow. Natasha made Rin her protégé? He had known Natasha a long time, and she had sworn to him she wasn't going to train anyone as young as her.

Though, Rin wasn't your typical eight-year-old.

"Yes, brother what did you say to cause Allfather to strike you?" Thor asked, bewildered and Clint put the pieces together. Clint wanted to kick himself in the ass now. He was Hawkeye, he should have seen the clean gash in his armor, the sheen of blood on the black leather. He could tell that the stab wound was just a hair below his heart. Did his father seriously go for a fatal shot? Sesshomaru's usually overdone paranoia was justified this time.

"Wait, his own father stabs him and you're asking what he did to deserve it? Are you serious?!" Clint tensed up again with a sudden flash of rage. Sesshomaru told him about how ruthless Odin could be, but Clint thought Loki would have Thor as back up. Now Clint wasn't so sure.

Thor straightened as if struck by his own lightning and Loki slowly turned to Clint, face blanked out, almost vulnerable.

"I wish to know what caused Allfather's ire, and Loki has been known to provoke it." Thor struggled with his words and Clint didn't care. If Loki and Odin really got into it again, whose side would Thor choose? Was Thor really that loyal to his senile old man?

Sesshomaru must think that Thor would sit by and let Odin kill Loki. And Sesshomaru was right, Odin almost killed Loki. He almost died in Asgard. Loki almost didn't come back to him. Clint's blood circulation sped up and stress levels spiked at the thought Thor would simply watch Loki die.

"And father of the year award goes to… " Tony started next to Clint, thankful for back up.

"That warlord is not my father." Loki corrected wearily. Clint didn't like the exhausted expression on Loki's face at all. If he wasn't going to be angry at Thor's nonsense, then he would.

After all, he was known as the guy who was counted on to act.

"Thor, Loki risked everything to go back to the place that imprisoned him in the equivalent of a CIA blacksite, gets almost fatally stabbed by your dad, and you blame him for it?" Clint's voice
peaked high in disbelief. Thor was an all around great guy. He's someone you'd call to get your cat out of a tree or get you medicine from the store if you were sick and just blamed his own brother for getting stabbed. By his own father!

'Sure, Loki had done some things in the past warranting a good kick in the ass. Loki will continue do things a swift kick in the ass but for Thor to say this is crap is over the line. Loki had gone through so much, and the guy who he was raised beside thought he deserved more abuse. Is this how it was with Loki growing up? Did he become a difficult, unreasonable, slightly unhinged prankster because that's all he could do? It's not like a prince can run away and join the circus. Not that I ran…' Clint reached out to Loki again, he wanted to notice him just like the time he broke down during the strategy meeting.

He couldn't imagine growing up believing either of his brothers, Nate or Jake, deserving something like that. Ever. He backed both of them up against their father's drunken outbursts, and Nate saved him more than a few times from getting bottled. Thor apparently didn't even visit him when he was imprisoned in their own house for three years and Clint made it out to Iowa State Penitentiary five times for the few months Jake was locked up. Just how much help did Loki get from Thor when they were growing up?

Clint finally caught Loki's green eyes, unreadable but his whole posture was thrown back in surprise. Why would Loki be surprised he was standing up for him?

"Son of Taisho, surely you know the ways of All—" Thor started and Sesshomaru moved so quickly even Loki was surprised.

In a flash, he squared up to Thor. Though a shade shorter than Thor, Sesshomaru rose tall, every inch of him intimidating.

"Do not assume you know anything about me, when you know so little of your own kin. Where do your loyalties lie Storm God?" Sesshomaru's placid voice even made Clint's hair stand on end. Thor's eyes widened in shock then darkened in defensiveness. He white knuckled Mjolnir and Tony took a step forward.

Clint couldn't decide if seeing Fancy Pants fight Thor would be worth it. He leaned towards no.

Sesshomaru slowly turned his back on Thor and elegantly exited the room, pausing slightly to shift his glance to Tony who went to follow without any hesitation.

"Can you not be pissy, for like two seconds?" Tony complained on his way out.

"Brother I… " Thor began, softer, and Loki just shot a bolt of green magic at his feet. Thor didn't react at the warped, singed floor. Tony was going to throw a fit.

"We don't share any blood, so I am certainly not your brother, you dumb oaf! To think I defended your intellect to Odin in the throne room! You don't you deserve any further praise from me. Thor, you are as tiresome and careless as you oblivious and naïve!" Loki's hackles raised and in a puff of green magic he vanished from the room. This reunion could have gone better.

For once, Clint understood one of Loki's tantrums. Loki needed someone to go calm him down, looks like it would be him. He didn't mind as much as he probably should have.

"Hawk's eye I fear I have made another misstep in understanding my brother. He called Rin his niece, so by custom he must see Son of Taisho as a brother, yet they share not any blood." Thor deflated in defeat. Clint felt for Thor despite himself. The guy clearly wanted to get closer with
Loki and they couldn't be more different than night and day.

"Give him some space Thor, and just… try to get some perspective. Your father's shit stinks like the rest of ours." Clint shrugged, either Thor would get it, or he wouldn't. He didn't have the energy to explain family dynamics to him. Clint turned to go find an overly emotional Demi God on the verge of a shit throwing breakdown.

Clint paused in his steps only a moment before setting off to one of the only rooms he knew he'd find his pain of the ass in: training room.

Pushing open the door of the training room, Clint caught the smell the unmistakable scent of Christmas and more than a few drops of blood on the floor which caused Clint to clench his fist, but no Loki, he must have just missed him.

'Dann. Hopefully he is still in the tower somewhere…I need to help him get back to normal before Fury shows up. I don't want SHIELD to have any excuse to try to lock him up or attack him. I've had enough of people treating Loki like he is some cold-blooded psychopath. Yeah, sure he is a bit power hungry, revenge driven, and has elitist tendencies with a narcissism complex to rival Tony's…Ok, so he's complicated. We've all been there, and I am going to help him sort it out, someone has to.' Clint scratched the back of his head, knowing that Loki had to be in substorage room 3-b.

Loki then teleported in front him, causing him to jump out of his skin, and almost strike him.

"Whoa. A little warning next time! You can't just do that to a trained assassin." Clint tried to save face, studying a stern Loki. His brown eyes locked on his glowing green ones, sussing out that he enjoyed getting the drop on him.

'No, he is probably reveling in that he suckered me into look for him. Conniving diva. He definitely planned this. Loki only seems spontaneous.'

"Ah, but half the fun is seeing your reaction! Allow me to see your injury, Rogers advised me a Chitauri wounded you." Loki pointed to Clint's left shoulder, a bandage peeking out from under his purple t-shirt. Clint leaned away from him.

"My wound?! You. You want to look at my graze? You're the one bleeding everywhere Mr. Biohazard. Are you not even going to tell me what happened to you?" Clint pried and gestured to the blood spatter on the floor. He then pointed to the black armor, shiny from wet blood.

"It's nothing, and nothing of real note occurred. Now show me your shoulder." Loki snapped his fingers and the blood on the floor vanished as if Clint dreamt it. Clint rolled his eyes. Loki's avoidant tendencies just exacerbated his flair for the dramatic.

"Oh yeah, tell that to Tony whose floor you scorched, and your best friend who almost mauled Thor." Clint quirked a grin at Loki's darkening facial features. He didn't mind riling Loki up like this, he liked it. It made his day.

"I lack a certain tolerance towards Thor's folly, its fortunate Sho has more. What transpired is too complicated to explain to a mortal." Loki dramatically sighed, fingers tingling with magic. Clint took a step back in offense, Loki's head snapped up, frowning.

Oh, so that's how it was? So, he looked down on him. The whole 'an ant has no quarrel with a boot' thing again. Clint thought they has gotten past that. But no.

Clint fought a renewed anger. He marched across the room and threw on the music, he already had
his playlist, Mischief Music, queued. He shrugged off his purple t-shirt on impulse and began to wrap his hands all the while feeling Loki’s arctic sun gaze peel the skin off the back of his neck.

"First, you come back stabbed by Thor's crazy dad, then you houdini in front of me, then you treat me like a little kid. I might not have the nerdy science-smarts that Bruce and Tony have, but I think I not only can handle but deserve an explanation. Or at least a cool story. So, if I knock you down again, I get it." Clint shrugged his bad shoulder, it burned but he didn't care. He was done with Loki's crap.

"Erase Me" by Kid Cudi and Kanye West started up.

'I can't get away from you, no
I keep on ducking, keep on ducking you
Nothing helps
I can't stop missing you, yeah'

"Clint your strengths far exceed those of Stark and Banner. And I will not spar with you if you're inju… " Loki started then paused, mischief dancing in his eyes. "If I knock you down, do I get my own reward?" Loki tapped his fingertips together, eyebrows raised in anticipation.

"Sure, but don't get your hopes up." Clint took off his boots and an excitement ballooned in him that made an extra bounce in his step. He couldn't wait to give Loki a swift kick in the ass, but his chest raised at the compliment that he now, of course, couldn't address. He didn't get that many compliments now-a-days. It was nice especially coming from a God who didn't give them often.

"I have yet to lose a fight I did not plan on losing. I will be looking down on you in victory." Loki glamored on more appropriate sparring clothes and lost his shoes. Immediately his shirt stained red and Clint almost regretted the whole thing but Loki shifted his weight back and forth like a prowling jaguar.

Game on.

"Says the guy who was once a pink deer. How'd you win that one again?" Clint taunted and Loki's green magic sparked out, Clint smiled genuinely in victory as the playlist cycled to the next song: "No Church in the Wild" by Jay Z and Kanye West.

'Human beings in a mob
What's a mob to a king?
What's a king to a god?
What's a god to a non-believer?'

Loki's brow creased and he crossed the floor in a perfectly spaced sashay into a tight back roundhouse kick.

Clint threw up his right forearm, blocking the kick with minimal effort as he countered with his own high crescent kick.

Loki tilted his head to the side and dipped back avoiding the kick. Clint followed up by pivoting, twisting and snapping his right leg back as a side kick. Clint grinned widely as the bottom of his foot grazed Loki's green tank top.

Yeah, he missed this.

They fell into a natural, up-tempo fighting grace that Clint had yet to match with anyone he had sparred with. His and Nat's sparring was usually more no-nonsense and straightforward. This had
more intensity, more energy, some chaos peppered in. Loki flowed out of his range and Clint ducked and twisted avoiding Loki's exquisite kicks.

Another Kanye song: "Champions"

'Look, I say a prayer for my enemies
They cannot slow down what's meant for me
Funny how they come around like I can't see through their secret identities'

Enticed, Loki aimed to grapple onto him, with a grace that Loki made look effortless. Clint secretly envied Loki's ability to make everything look so natural, like it just bloomed out of him. Clint slipped away to the side and rocketed a right hook at Loki's kidney, subconsciously avoiding hitting his chest. His knuckles scraped the ribbed green tank top and nothing more.

Clint blocked a left cross from Loki and grinned, enjoying himself. After all, he had been waiting way too long for this spar.

Clint then circled Loki and went for a takedown, grabbing the God from the side, Loki's smooth skin damp with sweat. However, Loki expertly placed a juke that swept his legs out from under him.

Shit.

Clint knew that the from the force of the backwards fall, and his arms still tangled from the takedown he attempted, he would either fall on his screwed-up shoulder, or worse a concussion. Damnit.

Clint hastily braced himself for an impact that would no doubt do some damage. In the split second before he hit the floor Loki impossibly flipped under him to come between him and the hardwood floor. Clint's head hit instead hit the flat, sinewy chest of a sweaty God of Mischief.

The resulting echo clamored through the training room.

"That was fun. Let's never do it again." Clint raised up, wrapping his head around what happened. Was Loki worried he'd get too hurt? He'd taken worse falls in the circus, and this was nothing compared to a SHIELD mission. Clint turned over to face Loki who was motionless against the floor.

"Knock You Down" by Kanye West and Keri Hilson played.

'When I look at you my mind goes on a trip
And you came in... and knocked me on my face
Feels like I'm in a race
But I... already won first place.'

Loki didn't respond. What if he had actually hurt him? Clint did land on his chest and he didn't want to cause the God more grief. Really, at all. Clint just wanted Loki to leave him alone.

But why then… why did he taunt Loki? Why did he count the hours for Loki to be back here on Earth with the Avengers, Fancy Pants, and himself? Why did he follow him, not the other way around, to the training room? The same room he practiced his archery for a worst-case scenario where he'd storm Asgard with a pissed off Demon Lord.

He would have taken on Thor's brawny buddies with Fancy Pants to get him back. Even take on his all mighty, all abusive, father.
Clint was about to sit up and shake Loki when his center of gravity shifted and Clint's bare back slammed hard against the floor.

The reverberating thud knocked the wind out of him. He wheezed and sputtered, that dick!

Clint could tell from the warm pressure on his hips and groin that Loki straddled him. Clint stilled beneath him, a slight cold air of self-consciousness swept over him. Talk about close quarters.

"I win, my dear archer." Loki's voice lilited hazily in the air like smoke. He sounded breathless and genuinely happy. Something in Clint warmed that he managed to hear that tone of his tenor voice, rather than the usual anxious or sphinx-like undertone.

"Black Skinhead" by Kanye West blared though the speakers,

'Baby we livin' in the moment
I've been a menace for the longest
But I ain't finished, I'm devoted
And you know it, and you know it.'

Clint opened his brown eyes and above him, brimming with excitement, Loki smiled radiantly. His green eyes, now almost crescent shaped in glee, glittered, alive and eager. His black hair draped down, framing his high cheekbones, appled in delight.

He looked like his friends in the circus after they just landed a new technique, only better.

It took Clint aback a little, and he caught himself returning the smile. Loki's broad, unmasked smile lit up his whole face. Clint warmed up like a fireplace in a Minnesotan snowstorm.

He had to get a grip.

"Like hell. You had to have used magic to catch me. No magic, remember?" Clint regained his mind, he willed the tightening in his groin and the fog of his mind to clear. His groin only tingled like that when he was about to engage in a different kind of action. His body had to have instinctively reacted like that having the slim hipped God straddling him in a position he more intimately knew as reverse cow girl…cowboy?

He regretted taking off his shirt for the sparring, his rapidly cooling skin now stuck to the floor. And it exposed him to Loki's cat-like eyes more than he ever wanted.

Loki leaned down, his lean torso bending at his butterflyed hips to close the gap between their lips to maybe seven inches. Loki's warm breath tickled his face. A warm hand supported some the God's weight on his uninjured shoulder, the other was right next to his head.

Clint swallowed and prepared.

"But I didn't use it to fight you, I used it to—" Clint's expertise wasn't in ground fights but he could show an MMA fighter a thing or two.

Or a certain God.

Clint bucked his hips up, hooked his legs around Loki's torso and slung him to the floor, reversing their positions. Something in Clint fired up. He won; he had Loki beneath him. Loki gasped up at him, vibrant green eyes wide in surprise. His usually tense and hard mouth broke open, slack and soft. The overhead lights shone down on Loki, highlighting him as if he laid on a stage.
Loki had a knack for attracting light and attention, just like the ringleader of a circus.

The last song on 'Mischief Music' queued up: "Heartless" by Kanye West.

'They say that they don't see what you see in me
You wait a couple of months, then you gonna see
You'll never find nobody better than me.'

"Again, I'm not a kid, I didn't need you to catch me, I've been banged up worse than this. Now, I want you to tell me what happened to you in Asgard." Clint unconsciously rolled his shoulder, it did burn like a bitch. He shouldn't have been so careless. He heard the Chitauri, but another had simply sneak out from behind a tree and got lucky. He killed them both.

Loki's eyes refocused Clint's bandaged shoulder. Loki had a one-track mind alright, he could heal himself thank you very much. He didn't need anyone to take care of him.

"I got confirmation of The Mad Titan's fleet. They are a light year away which puts them at perhaps two weeks out. Now, allow me to treat your shoulder." Loki swerved the conversation back to where he wanted it and Clint instead bent down and pinned Loki's own shoulders to the floor. Clint's brown eyes honed in on Loki's green shirt that was now stained with more red than Clint would have liked.

"No. Stop acting like I can't take care of myself. It will heal. Tell me, why are you acting like Odin attacking you is no big deal? If that stab wound had been a centimeter higher it would have nicked your heart or your aorta. You would have bled out!" Clint insisted, voice louder than he wanted. It hurt him that Loki didn't see this as something to get angry about.

Loki erupted like a volcano over Fancy Pants leaving for a mini vacation for three days, but his reaction over Odin trying to murder him is listless like an autumn day.

"But it di—" Loki started and Clint gripped down harder on Loki's shoulders, his calloused hands sliding over their angled planes. He ran his tongue over his teeth as he ran his eyes over the well-defined chest and abs of the leaner man beneath him.

An earthquake of rage rumbled in Clint, so deep it quaked his lungs.

"Loki!" Clint yelled. He didn't yell a lot. Magma burned in his gut and he bit the inside of his cheek to keep from grinding his teeth. Loki closed his mouth and turned away, not able to keep Clint's gaze.

"Sesshomaru told me Odin was, and I quote, 'capable of swift and lasting cruelty'. He was going to somehow storm Asgard and bring you back if Thor didn't. And you know what you, attention-addicted diva? I would have gone with him. So, don't spoon feed me your typical understated bullshit. I'm done with your riddles and 'don't look, but look' attitude. I won, I pinned you, now look me in the eyes and answer me!" Clint trembled with fading adrenaline. However, a thread of doubt wove through his words. Loki was a God. Clint suspected if he wanted, Loki could easily throw him off, but he hadn't.

Loki's green eyes turned, revealing disbelief and exasperation. He licked his lips making them glisten.

"Yggdrasil." Gesundheit? "Yggdrasil is the world tree, it is from which all our magic flows and connects all nine realms: Asgard, Jotunheim, Muspelheim, Alfheim, Vanavheim, Nidavellir, Svartalfheim, Niflheim and your Midgard. Odin harnesses Yggdrasil's power through the
Odinforce, and thus controls all magic. He controls the branches and roots of Yggdrasil, well, except one.” Loki's lips twitched and quirked up in a satisfied grin.

"Odin attacked my niece and Romanoff while in the throne room. I managed to not only defend them, but suppress Gungnir, the spear of the Odinforce. Such a result should not have been possible, Gungnir should have easily overpowered me. Upon this, Odin let us seek out Heimdall, but wanted to test what had happened. He aimed to strike a lethal blow, to provoke Yggdrasil, and it worked. A branch of Yggdrasil rebelled against the other eight and defended me as a cedar tree, hampering and diverting Gungnir's blow. The branch of Midgard has chosen me as a divine vessel of its magic." Loki's eyes darted to Clint's chest and his long arm rose despite the hand on his shoulder and traced Clint's old chest tattoo.

Clint was speechless, so the whole explaining things to a mortal thing now made sense. Norse mythology wasn't high on the list of SHIELD operational procedures.

"'Nothing of note happened' my bow hand. Who could ever attack Squirt?" Clint released Loki's shoulders somewhat reluctantly, just now realizing he had been straddling the lanky, handsome God for what could be deemed a longer than necessary period of time.

He wasn't in a rush to move though.

"You are a fool if you were to go to Asgard with Sho to retrieve me if I hadn't returned with the others. The only thing that could have prevented my return would have been my death." Loki furrowed his brow, magic coiling in his hands as runes that sunk into Clint's nineteen-year old chest tattoo. It tickled and Clint fought a chuckle, but gave into a smile.

Clint relaxed under the smooth, ivory white fingers that feathered intricate strokes on his rough skin. He knew his scarred skin and old, blown out tattoo must not be that interesting…Wait, his tattoo, it was a pair of antlers. The whole deer joke came full circle.

"Avenger, remember?" Clint said quirking an eyebrow. The tattoo was as a memorial to Nate, they both loved to bow hunt. Between the antlers were his brother's initials and the years 1979-1997. It wasn't a well-done tattoo, and by now probably too old to touch up.

Loki let loose a whip crack of laughter, eyes crinkling at the corners. Clint knew Loki probably thought they wouldn't stand a chance against Asgard, but he had fought against worse odds.

"I mean not to condescend you, ever, Clint. Yet, your wound may not heal correctly, a magical residue resides there. It was also my ignorance that allowed this attack to take place, now let me to attend to it." Loki insisted, lips thinning, meaning he meant business. Clint's light brown eyes hardened.

"Loki, this isn't your fault, and you're still bleeding! If you can't heal yours, you can't heal mine." Clint used his knees as leverage and finally stood up, feet on either side of Loki's sharp hipbones. He bent down offering him a hand up, the action mirroring a similar one a few days ago.

"Is that a challenge Clint?" Loki practically purred and Clint rolled his eyes. Everything was a damn game to him and it threw him off.

'Why do I always feel so off kilter around him? I say I'm not a kid but here I was literally pinning him to the floor of the training room.' Clint thought, halfway exasperated. Loki finally grabbed his hand, his slender smooth one in his wide calloused one and self consciousness washed over him once more. He didn't know why what Loki thought of his his beaten, worn, scarred-over body mattered, but it just did. Clint didn't like it.
Loki stood up, more gracefully than he did and set his hand on Clint's injured shoulder.

"It's an earnest request, Loki." Clint set his jaw, refusing to wince. Loki's magic reacted to the injury like static. Clint looked at his shoulder out of the corner of his eye, then back to Loki. They were close, real close. Clint could see individual hairs in his dark expressive eyebrows, the lines in his full bottom lip, the contours of his high cheekbones, his faint, barely there laugh lines and a line in between his eyebrows probably from glaring at Thor so much. He smelled the Christmas of his magic, he saw tiny flecks of blue in his green eyes. A blue that looked oddly familiar.

"I can remove its magic traces. Be still, Clint." Loki murmured the command, but it sounded too loud being that they were so close. Clint's body betrayed him, his groin tingled warm and tight just like when Loki straddled him earlier. That was not supposed to happen now.

'I cannot be attract… no. It's just because of our workout, his hyper-focused attention, and Christmas smelling magic is messing with me. Why did I want him to come home so soon?! I didn't think this through.' Clint swallowed a knot in his throat. Loki wasn't going to let this go. Instead of doing the hunting, he was being hunted. This was what Loki wanted the whole time and he fell for his trap like a moron.

Loki gingerly removed the bandage, revealing his blistered shoulder, sticky with pus and old blood.

"As if you're giving me much choice, drama queen." Clint grumbled, and Loki grinned softly in victory. This was supposed to be awkward, he was standing in the middle of the training room, shirtless with Loki who he had just finished straddling. Yet, even though he wanted to feel awkward, the situation itself felt vaguely right, natural.

Natural to have Loki's deft hands on him, standing than a foot away from him, focusing on Clint like a moth to a flame.

"I've been called worse." Loki waggled an eyebrow as he twitched his straight nose at the, bloody, blistered skin. Loki's mouth draw-stringed into a tight frown. Hovering silently, his hand blossomed green magic over the burn that seeped into the wound. The skin began to knit together and the blisters faded.

Clint's eyes widened, all the pain and tightness lifted from his shoulder like a bad dream. It would certainly save him a few days' recovery time; he could even get another spar in with Loki without having to worry it getting hit. Clint watched as, true to Loki's word, a faint wisp of blue smoke filtered out of the wound and was eradicated by Loki's green magic. Damn, Loki was right, there was some creepy, blue magic in him.

A small circle of green runes circled above his shoulder turned clockwise, lowering onto his shoulder and disappearing into his skin. A warm, familiar sensation hummed through his bones. Maybe, just maybe, getting help every now and then would be alright. Even from a God of Mischief.

"Oh. Ok, so you weren't making the magic stuff up. Thanks." Clint flexed his shoulder as it healed and he and Loki locked eyes. Loki's pupils constricted, offended and his nostrils flared.

'Damn, I didn't mean that. I don't want Loki to have another fit and overreact because he took something the wrong way again. I swear Loki weighs every word before he says it. While I don't lack a filter like Tony 'you can always count on me to pleasure myself' Stark and just say whatever, I can't compete with improv-master Loki.' Clint had to set the record straight.

"Don't look at me like that. I didn't think you were making it up. I am used to, well literally
shrugging off these sorts of injuries. I know you wouldn't lie to me about something like this.”
Clint's gut iced over in unexpected guilt because he really did trust him.

He trusted the God of Lies, like this won't backfire somehow.

Loki’s eyes danced and an arrogant smile returned, filling out his still flushed cheeks. Clint
exhaled, the icy feeling melting and a lightning bolt of fire zigzagged down from his groin. They
were still standing so close, and Loki's hand was still warmly cupping his shoulder and Clint was
losing his mind.

Clint swore Loki read his mind like an old book because he swept the distance between them
closed like curtains on a tent. Perfectly smooth skin slipped past his worn, stubble growing cheek
to his ear. He should have shaved.

Their chests weren't touching, but Clint could feel the heat from Loki's on his skin regardless. Clint
lost his mind in the Christmas scent, heavy on Loki's neck. The sweaty, curling strands of his dark
hair tickled his nose and Clint knew his breath had to be as heavy and humid in Loki's delicate ear
as Loki's was into his own battered one.

Loki's left hand strolled up his arm and left goosebumps in its wake.

"You're welcome Clint. I'll always be at your service, and you know I'm not keen on servitude.”
Loki's breathy voice fogged his mind as his soft lips and the tip of his sharp nose grazed the shell
of his ear.

Not on any sniper mission, not during any neuro-exam, did Clint stand so still. Just like a deer in
crosshairs, he froze.

Then time stopped.

Loki's lips pressed, unfurled, and released his temple. He heard the quiet smack of his lips, and
shivered at the barest graze of teeth and dart of wet tongue against his skin.

Clint's heart stopped in his chest, dead like a deer shot through.

Was…that a kiss? Did that make him sound like some school-yard preteen? Clint was no prude, he
had plenty of one night stands, in fact that's what he mostly had. But, that made his dick twitch. It
made flurries course through his blood stream.

His face had to be three different shades of red.

Loki kissed him…what was he supposed to do about it? Loki was probably just messing with him.
Loki was probably just trying to get in his head, Loki sure wasn't trying to get in his bed!

'I mean, this is Loki, God of Mischief. There is no way he seriously just kissed me out of anything
but 'Hey let's mess with the archer, per usual!' But, this is going too far. He has got to stop this…
whatever it is. Battle of wits I can do, battle of…whatever this was, was crossed the line. He has
some nerve.' Clint pushed Loki away from him, eyes aflame. He wasn't about to let Loki make a
fool out of him like this. This wasn't just some game.

Clint steeled himself to belt Loki across the face, fair play be damned. Loki slinked backwards and
Clint's anger dampened.

Loki didn't look how Clint wanted him to look, at all. There was no smirk, no mirth, no eyebrows
slanted down in challenge.
Loki's green eyes were wide with pupils as small as pinpricks. His lips parted as if he had just mouthed the phrase 'oh no'. Even the flush on his cheeks had drained out.

So, he didn't know what it was either.

Clint raised a finger and took a few steps back. Loki hid behind a bemused expression even Clint could tell was fake.

"I'm going to go—"
"I must be off—"
"Ok."
"Grand."

Clint continued to step back as if the distance would save him from the turmoil in his mind.

In a poof of Christmas scented mist Loki disappeared, leaving a shirtless Clint, alone, in the middle of the training room.

He put a hand to his temple, tapping the small section still wet from Loki's quicksilver mouth. Why was this his life?! What exactly was he supposed to do now?

Nothing. He would do nothing.

"I've been looking for you! Fury is here, you coming Clint? Why are you shirtless?" Clint jumped again, hearing Steve behind him.

"Loki healed my shoulder because of course I managed to get cursed or something. I'll be right there." Clint tugged on the purple T-shirt again, cursing himself that Steve caught him shirtless and awkward. He first went to the bathroom to splash water on his face then made his way up to the main room.

Clint willed himself to act normal and sprawled on the black leather sofa awaiting what was sure to a Haley's comet event. Nat even had popcorn ready as she walked into the room. She lowered the bag to him then jerked it away right as he tried to get some.

"Too slow, you're losing your touch old man." Nat tossed some popcorn in her mouth. Oh, he wasn't losing his touch he was just losing his sanity.

"Hey, respect your elders then and pass me some. I'm ready for the Fury and Fancy Pants cage match." Clint jutted his chin and Nat passed him the bag. It was good to have her back.

'Yeah Clint, just your normal everyday business as usual. Your boss is coming by your genius billionaire friend's super hero hide out to question a Demon Lord. Totally normal.' Clint chomped a piece of popcorn then realized something.

'Whoa, since when did I consider Tony a friend? I mean, sure we did the Avengers thing for a bit, but that was more forced interaction. I never really thought of the guy as someone to hang out with. In fact, what about Thor, Steve, Bruce? Again, all nice dudes, well except when Bruce hulks out, but we don't really have much in common, except trusting each other to eat shwarma in peace...Wait. Trust. They trust me.' Clint, with expert accuracy, hit Bruce in the back of the head with a popcorn kernel.

Bruce turned and Clint looked away innocently.

"Double or nothing, Hill or Coulson gets off a shot at Glow Stick before Pretty Boy melts their
guns." Nat stole back the popcorn. Clint made a face.

Nat was referencing their previous bet of Rin being able to win over the Allfather with arts and crafts. Clint said it would take nothing short of a macaroni necklace, but she did it with just a picture.

"You're on." Clint and Nat shook on it, taking a mental note he would have to ask her about why Odin attacked her in Asgard later. Hopefully, Steve would come back soon and claim the seat next to him and not Loki.

One, he didn't want to be in the possible crossfire. Two, well, two should be obvious.

'Ok. I've got to stop thinking about that kiss that wasn't. I have got to stop thinking about that dark haired, fair skinned God who flips a switch from breaking apart to lashing out in mere seconds.' Clint affirmed and immediately started thinking about hockey, hopefully his Blackhawks would win tonight.

'Yeah, think hockey, not Loki. Steve will sit down next to me here any second.' Clint adjusted himself on the sofa, trying to calm his antsy nerves. Not knowing where Loki was made Clint on edge, that either Loki was scheming something for him, or SHIELD was scheming something against Loki.

He never got a straight answer from the God about his feelings on what his father did, he had snaked his way out of it. A charging jolt darted deep his groin, remembering his smile when he strad—

No. Think of something else. Damnit.

Just then Jaken waddled into the room wearing a new Metallica T-shirt that actually fit with upscale headphones, and his demented staff. If the shirt fit it meant he didn't steal it from Tony, how did Jaken get a shirt like that?

It then dawned on Clint just how ridiculous his life had become.

'Yup, wondering where the buddy of a Demon Lord who can turn Washington DC into Washington B.C. and the Hulk into a chia pet, buys his clothes. What a normal life I lead…Chi chi chi chia!' Clint even sang the jingle in his head.

"Alright. Where is he? The real Demon because don't expect me to believe that the Demon Lord I met before was really him." Fury swept into the room flanked by Hill and Coulson like a bad action movie. Steve followed close behind, winded.

Good Steve is here now he ca—

Clint paled as Loki teleported next to him on the sofa, wearing his typical green shirt, chest apparently healed, and black leather pants. Loki waved his hand at Coulson and Hill languidly. Of course, he'd act like nothing happened between them. Wait, that was for best.

Hill and Coulson whipped out their Glock 17s. Loki simply reached a toned arm across Clint for the popcorn Nat held, popping some in his mouth. That prima donna just has to the center of attention, doesn't he?

"No, I suppose the cat, or rather dog is out of the bag." Loki winked at Fury. 'I just can't win a bet to save my life.' Clint groaned, spotting Coulson's itchy trigger finger.
"Hey Brooklyn 99, my tower isn't a isn't a shooting range, and Pepper likes that sofa." Tony entered the room from the kitchen with Pepper and Fancy Pants. Fancy Pants was decked out in designer jeans, a white silk button up shirt, top buttons unbuttoned, and his aviators on his head.

"You know your collar isn't popped." Clint taunted at Sesshomaru as Thor came into the room eating leftover fruit salad.

Sesshomaru popped his collar, either out of ignorance or spite, and Nat snickered at Clint.

"Hello friends! Man of Fury, perchance would you like to partake of this assorted diced fruit? 'tis good." Thor offered to Fury and Fury shot him a look that could have melted the plastic bowl it was in.

Two more nameless agents swept in, both pointing their guns at Loki, Clint wouldn't have been surprised if they had snipers on the building across the street.

Just then, Rin raced through the room, wearing her 'com-Rin-icator' and with two ice cream cones. Oh man, perfect timing squirt.

"Hello Mr Fury. I'm Rin! I heard Stark say you're angry over your lack of depth perception, so I hope this cheers you up! Polly and my Lord Sesshomaru say that you will like rocky road!" Rin beamed a smile that could have melted a glacier and handed Fury a melting ice cream cone. She then careened across the room and handed Bruce the other cone. Tony muttered the word 'traitor'.

"Hello Banner! Thank you so much for saving Jaken! Here is your cone, it's chocolate vanilla swirl! Lord Sesshomaru said you would like it because its two opposite things, vanilla and chocolate, but together as one flavor!" Rin smiled and handed him the cone.

"Thanks Rin, that's...symbolic." Banner accepted the ice cream cone and looked to Sesshomaru who showed no expression at all.

Rin, oblivious to the guns, skipped up to Loki and sat directly in his lap with no hesitation. Sesshomaru took a step forward, squaring himself to Fury. Jaken took his place besides Fancy Pants.

Now that Clint thought about it, Jaken and Fury sort of looked alike.

Nat turned her head to Hill cutting a 'really?' glance; Hill reluctantly dropped her Glock, along with the two other agents in response. Coulson didn't and Nat glowered sharply but didn't move.

"I assume the girl isn't a long lost daughter of yours Stark." Fury gestured to Tony and he backed up reflexively.

"No, Dum-e can barely handle fire duty, much less handle sibling rivalry. Rin is his adopted...ward, daughter, sidekick." Tony gestured to Sesshomaru. Fury's eye bulged.

"..." Sesshomaru did nothing but make eye contact with Fury.

"Uncle Loki are they all here to meet my Lord Sesshomaru?" Clint heard her whisper into Loki's ear. She brought a twinkle to Loki's eyes. Clint couldn't help but smile.

"Oh yes, they are all quite anxious to meet him." Loki's smile lit up his face devilishly and Hill snorted.

'The best agents of SHIELD brought to a grinding halt due to a little girl. A little girl who loves
Loki of all people. Can't get better than that.' Clint thought wryly, Loki next to him who was working tangles out of Rin's hair with his magic.

'Gotta hand it to him, he is good with kids.' Clint looked back to Sesshomaru sizing up Agent Coulson, whose gun never left Loki.

'Loki did stab him in the back with a magic scepter after all, but just like with Rhodey, it's a risky shot with Rin in his lap. Not that Loki would let anything happen, he has that Christmas tree magic now.' Clint reassured himself with another handful of popcorn, but regretted it. The vicious vibes Coulson put out began to knot Clint's stomach.

"Alright, enough pleasantries. I am Nick Fury, Director of SHIELD and the Avengers, I'm sure 'Real Power' has told you about me." Nick Fury took a daring lick of his ice cream cone.

Fancy Pants remained completely uninterested.

"I don't like being fooled. That stunt where you got Loki to be you, I wasn't the biggest fan." Fury accused and took a step to close the distance between himself and Fancy Pants.

"..." Sesshomaru darted his eyes to Tony then Nat.

"Yeah, I figured it may not have been your idea. You can fool a lot of people, but you can't fool me. What I want to know is why you're here." Fury took a larger lick of his rocky road cone this time.

"..." Sesshomaru slowly rolled his gaze over to Loki, narrowing them slightly.

"As I figured. Agent Romanoff sent me your home movies of you and 'Real Power' on Stark Tower, and your crash course in medieval strategy to the Avengers. Your ballet with on the helipad was also informative." Fury shifted his weight and Clint saw Tony gesture wildly at Nat who just smiled and shrugged.

"..." Sesshomaru flicked his eyes back to Fury and raised his eyebrows.

Clint heard Tony whisper to Pepper if she thought Fancy Pants was going to say anything at all, she smiled and shrugged, clearly amused.

"Now, what I want to know is are you on the Avengers' side? Asgard's? Loki's? I saw your fight in Central Park courtesy of YouTube and you on the Statue of Liberty by a damn traffic copter, you aren't exactly someone I can ignore." Fury took another step closer.

"Aye, that Chopper Dave is an exceedingly intrepid patrolman!" Thor spoke up eating some cantaloupe and Loki face-palmed. Fury slowly turned to Thor, and slowly turned back.

"..." Sesshomaru leveled a neutral stare at Fury.

"Ok, on your own side. It's the answer I'd expect with someone the title of 'Demon Lord'. However, if I were to say...incapacitate your dance partner, Loki, over there, drug him up, and make him scream his mother's name, you'd have a problem with that, wouldn't you?" Fury threatened with a bold hypothetical and Thor moved. Steve jumped to restrain him. Clint internally swore, the last thing he wanted was for Fury to be stupid here. He'd quit SHIELD if they tried to torture Loki. He wouldn't let it happen even if that put him up against Nat. Clint's shoulders tensed and he sat up straighter, in case he had to be on his feet.

Clint noticed Rin understood exactly what Fury was implying because her face hardened and she
turned to loop her arms around Loki's neck protectively.

'Rin is a cute kid, but she needs better barometer for 'could this person be the number one shooting target of the free world?' Clint saw a few hidden wisps of Loki's green magic smoke out in anger. Clint put his hand on his shoulder to calm him down. He rested his hand there, absorbing Loki's heat, it just seemed like the right thing to do. Loki turned his head to Clint, green eyes round in shock. Clint raised his eyebrows and mouthed 'chill out'.

"..." Sesshomaru tipped his head down slightly. So quickly Clint almost didn't catch it, Sesshomaru's hazard green whip lashed out past Fury, grappled around Coulson's Glock 17 and retracted it back.

Sesshomaru's toxin melted the muzzle of the handgun as he calmly walked back to Coulson and placed it back in his hand. Fancy Pants' lips curved up slightly as venomous as his whip. Clint pumped his fist in the air then laid out his hand, palm up at Nat.

Nat placed two fifties in Clint's hand and Clint crumpled them up in victory, catching her snort.

"Yeah, I figured you wouldn't like that too much. So, I'll cut a deal with you." Fury squared up, licking his ice cream cone again. Coulson put the ruined gun away, still studying Loki.

Sesshomaru clicked his talons and straightened.

"I can't afford to be dealing with you and another alien invasion, and you'd be a lot more useful on our side. I was going to offer to work for us, but you don't look like the type to work for anyone." Fury paused, using his ice cream cone as a pointer to the window. Sesshomaru lifted his chin haughtily.

"So, instead, if you agree to be a strategic consultant for the Avengers, and if 'Real Power' over there behaves, we will leave him be. When we win this war, which we will with both of your help, we will wipe the slate. Pending he doesn't try to cross me again." Fury glared a dark eye over to Loki who put on his best 'who me?!' face. Clint hid a smirk.

Fury then put out his hand and Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes.

Pause.

Sesshomaru shook Fury's hand, eyes never leaving Fury's one eye.

"Oh and, one more thing, Banner?" Fury asked, releasing Sesshomaru's pale hand.

"..." Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow in Bruce's direction. Bruce waved mockingly at Fury as if to say 'I'm right here!'

"Gotta. I think we will get along just fine. We will see you tomorrow at eleven for the news conference. Please don't wear that Nirvana T-shirt." Fury smirked and took another lick of his ice cream cone.

"..." Sesshomaru inclined his head slightly.

"Agent Hill, Agent Coulson, let's go, we have a council meeting, and a meeting with the UN, EU, NATO, and Xi Jinping of China." Fury turned and began to walk briskly out of the room.

"Sir. The Demon didn't even say anything. How can we trust him? And what did you mean by Banner?" Hill immediately questioned as they walked to the elevator. Coulson didn't look
convincing either, his face masked.

"I concur with Agent Hill. I don't like the feel of either of them. I also think that neither of them are a good influence on Banner." Coulson agreed, voice stern. Clint raised his eyebrows at that, if only they saw what he saw in substorage room 3-b.

"He didn't need to say anything and something tells me that Demon is exactly what Dr. Banner needs. Besides he was right, I love rocky road. Did either of you know my favorite was rocky road?" Fury gestured to both Coulson and Hill and neither said anything.

"See? This is already working out." Fury answered, with all four confused agents stepping into the elevator.

Pause.

"Sho, training the Doctor's beast? How charitable." Loki smirked, leaning against Clint so their arms touched.

"This Sesshomaru repaid a debt." Sesshomaru said simply. Across the room, Bruce sighed.

"That conversation with Fury may have been the most impressive thing you've done yet, Pretty Boy." Nat actually clapped softly after eating more popcorn.

"One can safely say your first encounter with Fury went much better than mine." Loki praised and Rin wiggled in his lap and jumped off to stand by Fancy Pants.

"Figures the most successful conversation with Fury would be him just listening to his own voice." Clint leaned back on the sofa and he was rewarded Loki's sparkling laugh.

"Hey, Nat, we are going to have to discuss what you take and don't take from Jarvis and, uh you know, give to SHIELD." Tony crossed his arms, looking disapproving at Nat.

"I had proper authorization." Nat gave a thumbs up to Pepper.

"Phil deserved to know. I take at least twelve percent of the credit." Pepper winked at Tony who threw his hands in the air in defeat.

"Everyone is fired." Tony sighed dramatically.

"I am perplexed over why the Chitauri would send one of their ships to Earth far in advance of their own fleet. They blew an important tactical advantage of surprise. They would not have known I was here on Midgard to tip them off." Loki leaned forward, his unexpectedly broad shoulders flexing under his thin green shirt. Clint's senses rumbled with the desire to pin Loki down again.

"...they sensed me from the start. They knew my name and title. They sought me out for capture, for either being Loki or myself." Sesshomaru's smooth voice washed over the room and Loki, startled into confusion, sparked his green magic.

"They were trying to abduct you from the start and you knew it?! You know that makes what you did even more unacceptable." Steve shot up, agitated. Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side. Clint didn't like it either; he just wouldn't allow them to get to Loki, or anyone else he cared about.

"The Chitauri should not know you. My memories of you were that you were deceased. They also should have no means of tracking you or any reason they would suspect me as you…unless Tenseiga has been vocal like he was in New Mexico." Loki's dark, arched eyebrows shot up.
"It was Ryukotsusei's spirit from the underwold. Tenseiga has been quiet and obedient. He would dare not chatter to those base lifeforms." Sesshomaru, offended, cut his gaze to Loki.

"Swords. They're swords. You don't see me giving my bow names or saying it talks." Clint rolled his eyes and everyone looked at him, Fancy Pants raising an eyebrow.

"What, you don't want a magic bow, cupid?" Nat's blue eyes lit up, scheming. 'Ugh, please don't let that nickname catch on with Tony, or that be a jab at Loki and I.' Clint saw Loki's spine stiffen.

"Ryukotsusei...why would the Other know to conjure such a spirit? How would he have the means?" Loki murmured, eyes wide, mostly to himself.

"Does anyone else not like the timing of this attack? All the sudden the Chitauri come looking for Loki on Earth rather than Asgard where everyone besides us thought he was imprisoned?" Bruce chimed in, picking up a grape and chucking it at Clint, missing.

"And making the same mistake we all did, and that Fury suspected? Confusing Sailor Moon for Reindeer Games?" Tony finished, Clint caught Tony mouthing something inaudible to Fancy Pants.

Loki shot to his feet, his magic smoking black.

"How foolish you mortals can be!" Loki's cackle cracked like a slammed door and everyone jumped save Fancy Pants and Nat.

"Someone on Midgard has been talking to The Other! There is a traitor in your precious SHIELD! There is no other reason for them to think Sesshomaru as I. Why else would a long deceased Dragon spirit be in their armada?! Not even Heimdall on Asgard knew of my shapeshifting ploy, and no one, save a scant few, thought I was off Asgard." Loki revealed and Clint's mouth went dry like he just ate sand.

"I had calculated their fleet at a vastly different position than they are currently. The traitor and The Other have been sharing secrets of my magic and your technology for years to account for such an advance in their course. And now whoever this traitor is has shared your Director's suspicion of Sesshomaru with the Other." Loki continued.

"If I were this traitor, I would have exaggerated the scepter's influence over Clint to provide a smokescreen to my own scheming and a most convenient blood sacrifice in case it all went awry." Loki concluded, chuckling, and Nat's blue eyes focused on a point on a wall like a sniper scope.

Clint's chest pitted. Loki was laughing at him, at how stupid he was.

"Fool me once, shame on you... fool me twice, shame on me. It's poetic that I'm still someone's puppet. I've been used for years as their fall guy, their damn scapegoat. I'm such a sucker." Clint whispered to himself and like granite, his muscles hardened and his blood chilled. How fucking funny. His entire life was now a punchline of a bad joke. Even Loki had just laughed.

How ironic. SHIELD suspected he was a traitor when there was an actual traitor in their organization. He had lost countless friendships, like Hill and Coulson. He had been passed over for countless missions and promotions all over the scepter. He was labeled a 'career cancer' and in turn worked twice as hard to try to turn it around. What was the saying? Work smarter not harder? Loki now thought he was some jackass idiot.

Clint bit his cheek so hard it drew blood.
'When I was in the circus, we all bonded and became a big dysfunctional family. We shed blood, sweat and tears for each other. I shed a lot more blood, sweat, and tears for SHIELD, and an even more dysfunctional family formed. This traitor took that from me, but it was my job to see something like this coming. I wasted three years of my life, and it cost me everything, and now it's going to cost us the whole damn planet.' Clint tongued the metallic cut in his mouth and his gut emptied out. He was going to be sick.

"Clint." Nat put the popcorn bowl on the sofa to assess Clint's mood.

"It's just as Sesshomaru said, first step for an invasion is to establish a spy network and get information on your enemy." Bruce chuckled to himself, looking a bit green.

"I will not allow the Chitauri to recapture my brother. We must root out these spies and bring them to justice! It is forbidden to abduct a Prince of Asgard!" Thor shouted and went to move next to a darkened Loki.

"Oh yeah, forbidden to abduct a Prince, but if that same Prince abducted a Demon Lord..." Tony said under his breath and Clint had had enough. He rocked his weight forward and stood up. He needed air.

He spent his life wanting to be useful, not used, but wasn't that a cute little tightrope walk?

"I'll start gathering intel. We don't know what surveillance means these Chitauri or the SHIELD agents have. They could have spied on us through Stark Tower's cameras, not only with agents." Nat supplied, Tony frowned in offense.

"Hey, uh, Natalie, before you start searching for possible holes in my security, focus on your own known issues. JARVIS has been set to maximum security, I would know if he was compromised. You and Clint need to know how far up the flagpole this goes." Tony crossed his arms. Nat stood to address Tony's ego and Clint found the necessary distraction to escape.

'SHIELD doesn't trust me, maybe they shouldn't. The Avengers must think I'm an idiot, I can't blame them. This wouldn't have happened to Nat. Even Loki mocks me. That stings.' Clint slipped out of the room, ignoring the bickering and objections coming from all sides. He crept out the roof access and leaned against the wall of Stark Tower, slowly sliding down its wall to a seated position against it.

Elbows on knees and head in his hands, Clint inhaled and exhaled, but the lead dense weight of mental exhaustion still crushed his head in. Maybe he should just give up and quit SHIELD.

"This doesn't suit you Clint." Loki's voice sounded dark and cold like a cave and Clint didn't bother looking up. What did Loki care? Why did he have to follow him out anyway?

"Oh, yeah, what does? Humor me. I could use a good laugh because that's what my life has apparently turned into... everyone laughing at Hawkeye! Including you, not that I blame you. Hawkeye, the clown of the SHIELD circus! The traitor must be having a good laugh right now, thinking 'hey, let's use that chump Hawkeye for our frame job! No one takes him seriously anymore, no one believes a word he has to say. What a perfect fool for our fool-proof plan!'" Clint muttered, voice muffled into his chest, knowing Loki heard it anyway. Couldn't he just leave him alone?

His chest sloped and heaved forward in a bow of silent surrender. Not since 1997 did such a hollow pit of loneliness carve itself into his gut. Only terrible agents let this happen to them, only terrible uncles help a traitor destroy their planet. What if that Dragon-con succeeded in capturing Fancy
Pants? Loki would have never forgiven him.

A shadow draping then slipping off him was the only indication Loki knelt down in front of him until green eyes burned a hole in his forehead.

He finally lifted his head up and his jaw went slack from the raw, icy malice that washed out Loki's face like a harsh florescent light.

"I was laughing at the traitor's impending oblivion." Sinister didn't come close to describing Loki just then. He loomed like a jungle-eyed specter from a Vietnam veteran's night terror. "I'd never mock your pain Clint." A knot loosened in Clint's throat, so Loki didn't think he was useless.

"It's a pain I know too well." Loki's black, sparkling magic surrounded him like a shroud.

It was true.

Loki was used as a scapegoat by The Other, but never did he think Loki was an idiot. Loki was a fugitive to Asgard and when he willingly went back and got stabbed Clint didn't blame him for not predicting it. Everything between them came full circle.

"Be merciless for what they did to you. Be my light of justice Clint, and I will be your shadow of vengeance." Loki whispered fiercely as he spread his black magic around them like a dark tent.

An answer died in Clint's swollen throat as Loki's hot mouth melted onto his own.

Chapter End Notes

Ohh...thematically this might be my favorite chapter so far! I'm not usually such a fan of song lyrics, but they all just fit. Clint and Loki, everything about them just circles each other. Now SHIELD has a double agent(s), Clint has a not-so secret admirer, and Jaken has some new clothes.

Next chapter: Sesshomaru's perspective and it WILL BE MATURE RATED. PREPARE FOR THE LEMON. YES THIS FIC IS A SLOW BUILD BUT ITS WORTH IT.

Please comment and let me know what you think of this chapter, it was a lot of work! you guys motivate me :)

-TL
Sesshomaru and the Affliction

Chapter Notes

SMUT INCOMING.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sesshomaru and the Affliction

(*)

Sesshomaru fussed with the collar of his button up shirt, why Barton told him to raise it he had no idea. Why he did it he had little idea. On his hip, Bakusaiga burbled in merriment, she indeed enjoyed the archer's antics.

Why he listened to any of these humans he had no idea. Maybe he was going mad.

This whole day had tested Sesshomaru's patience to its breaking point. First the imbecilic Chitauri, then the arrogant Ryukotsusei, then the atrocious helicarrier who presumed to order him about, followed by Rogers' untimely interruption. He pushed further to the back of his mind Banner, who dared lecture him on transformations, and Thor's ignorant ramblings.

Sesshomaru's youki had bristled right under his skin. He was so on edge that he doubted he would leave Fury unscathed.

Fury, however, rankled him less than some Lords and Ladies he had the immense displeasure of negotiating with, which was why he allowed that one serious human to keep his arm and just corrode his firearm.

It wasn't the action he took upon Loki that disturbed him. Loki possessed more than enough magic reserves to protect Rin from the small firearm.

What disturbed him was Tenseiga's revulsion of the human. Tenseiga adored humans, which Sesshomaru continually did his best to ignore. However, he scathed at him that the human was unnatural; that he wasn't supposed to be and to destroy him. Sesshomaru took orders from no one, especially Tenseiga.

Tenseiga's bias was clear, Loki helped forge him after all. Yet, his insistence to have Bakusaiga cleave this boring human's head from his shoulders genuinely surprised him.

But it wasn't the largest surprise of the day.

Sesshomaru rarely got taken off guard, even more rarely surprised. Yet, Stark had inspired both out of him. Sesshomaru's interest was piqued.

'This human has an unforeseen positive impact on my youki when we interact, especially in a physical capacity. Most intriguing. I wonder if this what it is like to mate. I will investigate this matter further.' Sesshomaru decided while standing outside on the balcony with Loki, the humans and Thor eating a dinner consisting of repellent spices and other smells.
Sesshomaru didn't know what 'Tex-Mex' was and had no interest in finding out. It looked impossible to eat and smelled so rancid he sneezed upon it arriving. He commanded Jaken to stay with Rin during dinner, insuring she consumed none of that 'queso' Thor, Barton, and Romanoff had become obsessed with. It oozed on the plate like a Panther Demon's brain fluid, which was no delicacy.

He retreated to the rooftop, and Loki, for reasons beyond him, followed close behind. Rin had confirmed his suspicions about the Cosmic Cube, and its current location.

Sesshomaru had a feeling that it would not be the last he would hear of the Six Gems of the Greater Cosmos.

"So, out with it. What troubles you now?" Loki next to him put his hand on his hip, putting most of his weight on one leg. His eyes flashed here and there, unable to focus on anything for long.

Troubled him? It was clear to Sesshomaru he was not the troubled one on the rooftop.

"I care not for that one human in Fury's employ, the dull, serious man with little hair." Sesshomaru fiddled with his sunglasses, wondering how they kept getting smudged. The orange sun now slipped beneath the horizon, and the city looked unsettling, especially with the helicarriers whirring in the distance attempting to extract the space ship from the water.

"Ah. Agent Coulson, I quite literally stabbed him in the back with the Other's scepter. He attempted to shoot me with a weapon made from the destroyer I sent after Thor. I had little choice. His distaste for me is more than mere ire. The Avengers adore the man, and he Captain America. Lady Potts is especially taken with him; don't speak ill of him." Loki scrunched his nose, green magic curling around his fingers.

So, even humans liked him. Tenseiga grumbled in his sheath, his aura dark.

"Yet, I do not think Agent Coulson is what truly bothers you. Is it Ryukotsusei and how the Other selected him to capture you?" Loki wore a bemused smile that fit his handsome features.

"... No. Ryukotsusei's broken spirit does not bother me." Sesshomaru admitted, though perhaps against his better judgment.

"It bothers me." Loki snapped, though Sesshomaru could tell it was not directed at him. "How they managed to conjure a Demon Spirit is beyond me. The Demon Underworld has been closed off for centuries, I would know." Loki paced and Sesshomaru loathed it when Loki paced.

"I have my suspicions. I aim to confirm them shortly." Sesshomaru muttered, mostly to assuage Loki's stress. He had been acting strangely ever since he returned from what appeared to be a failed attempt to console Barton. The sullen archer would obviously concern Loki. Loki held a certain fondness for involving himself others' problems. Sesshomaru viewed it as primarily meddling, but in this instance Loki had genuinely wanted to heal Barton's mental anguish.

"Fine. Be obtuse Sho, how thrilling. What truly bothers you then?" Loki spat, and Sesshomaru darkened. Not another irritancy. Loki acting this petulantly never boded well and Sesshomaru was not in a particularly tolerant mood. He must truly fancy Barton.

Sesshomaru decided, against better judgment, to answer fully.

"Stark engaged my person physically on the helipad before you arrived. This Sesshomaru reciprocated." Sesshomaru reported and watched as Loki's face lit with comprehension.
"...Stark became intimate with you on the helipad? Most forward, even for him. I wouldn't have suspected him to be so daring, I stand corrected." Loki rocked back on his heels, jaw dropping. Sesshomaru couldn't tell if that was a jab at him or not, so he allowed it to slide.

Loki began to hum and his pacing ceased.

Sesshomaru's ears raised in victory, his ploy at manipulating Loki into a better mood succeeded. He required Loki's help in understanding Stark's motives. The only way he could broach the subject without Loki catching on was to allow Loki to think he pried it out of him.

"He implied that I was a liability when I kited the vessel and engaged it myself. When I corrected him that I was no such liability, he kissed me with no pretense nor context." Sesshomaru explained, searching Loki's glowing green eyes for an answer. He had meant the sentence in all sincerity to Stark when he said it. By no means would he risk the success of the defense of this time and fall to these Chitauri. It...actually caused a spike of pain through his sternum for Stark to imply such an outcome.

Loki laughed with the barest hint of playfulness.

"I doubt Stark meant to imply you were a liability. He most likely wanted to convey some concern over your well-being. I viewed the video, you were almost overpowered by the cannon." Loki paused when Sesshomaru's chin tilted up and honed an angry gaze his direction. He rebuffed it, even with some youki to spare. Yet, he concerned himself with his welfare when he flew so haphazardly in battle?

"I had noticed Stark has harbored an interest in you since the night of the Steakhouse. I dare say you have a similar inclination towards him." Loki's smile was that of a cat watching a mouse. Sesshomaru's eyes widened then narrowed coldly. So, the business between Stark and Loki in Stark's quarters was to incense his envy, was it?

Sesshomaru refused to be baited.

"My motives towards him remain unclear. I will understand them better by coupling with him." Sesshomaru, uncharacteristically, tousled his own hair, as if shaking something out of it. Surely this situation will all make more sense once they actually coupled. He could organize and collect his impractical emotions and convey them to Stark if need be.

Loki then laughed so hard green sparks of magic flew from his fingers.

"Let no one say you don't have a romantic way with words. I warn you dear friend, Stark has garnered quite a Midgardian reputation for being a fickle harlot. While he may want you now, he can easily turn his attentions elsewhere, and has ample opportunity to do so." Loki contained himself and his tone turned serious.

'Choose a human over me? He'd be a fool to after I demonstrate my talents.' Sesshomaru finally flipped his collar back down. Better.

'Loki to address Stark's reputation must mean he thinks that I am making myself vulnerable. Loki needless worries. I have a duty to return to my time, so it should be heedless.' Sesshomaru furrowed his eyebrows slightly, wondering when returning to his time became simply a duty and not where he thought he belonged.

"This Sesshomaru intends to seek no mate from this time. Human or...otherwise." Sesshomaru's eyes flickered in the light of the setting sun. The last word was a bit of humor directed at Loki's
expense for Thor. If he coupled with his older brother, whether or not Loki referred to Thor as his brother or not, Loki may or may not level a small realm with his outburst.

"By the Norns, surely you don't refer to Thor! I will not allow that blunderer to…. You cur!" Loki flung a barb of magic Sesshomaru's way when he caught the flicker of levity in his eyes. "Yet this is the first time I have witnessed you so avid over someone. The look upon your face when you found us on his bedroom floor was a sight to behold….Stark is quite striking." Loki jested back and Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and lowered his ears. Loki would dare not repeat that performance in Stark's chambers.

Again, Sesshomaru would not be baited, for he knew how to truly goad Loki.

"If you wish to have Stark, perhaps I will turn my attentions to a certain Archer. He did buy me a delicious meal, a human mating ritual, and he knows my tastes. I could aim to slake his own earthly tastes—" Sesshomaru's lips lifted in a rare, sly smirk and his eyes glinted a bright yellow as he dodged a thrown dagger.

Point, himself.

"Certainly not. To both. While Stark is intelligent, I don't him that stimulating or graceful. You can keep the hotheaded inventor." Loki snorted and crafted a red rose of magic in the air and gave it to Sesshomaru who raised his eyebrows and widened his eyes at the God. A rose?

"It is Midgardian tradition to bestow a gift of a rose to an intended lover. Surely you don't want him to think this is your first time…or maybe you wish to play the part of the blushing maiden?" Loki's grin was all teeth and mischief. Sesshomaru incinerated the rose in his hand with his toxin with an unmitigated growl. How dare Loki imply he lacked carnal prowess because he was just shy of mating age!

Point, Loki.

"This an exploratory coupling only! You take many extreme liberties with this Sesshomaru." Sesshomaru's glare could have shattered diamonds, but it didn't deter Loki in the least. Sesshomaru almost regretted distracting Loki from his previous poor mood, but he decided to take it a step further instead.

"Not nearly as many as Stark will this nightfall." Loki jumped back to avoid the crack of Sesshomaru's whip and he drew his uru daggers. Sesshomaru knew his face had blushed, and could see the God saw it too. Insufferable God!

'I knew it was sheer lunacy to ask advice from Loki. He will pester me about this affliction of affection for an eternity.' Sesshomaru twisted and flipped, avoiding Loki's dagger strike.

Sesshomaru contemplated souring Loki's jovial mood to point out that at least the object of his affection sought him out, but decided against it. The nature of his relationship with Barton was truly none of his business, and Loki seldom had much to pester him about. He would let the prankster have his fun. Somewhat.

"Silence, Kiki. You do remember that particular conquest of yours, don't you?" Sesshomaru instead reminded him of that Phoenix Demoness who plagued him so.

"That strumpet melted my favorite pair of vambraces, how could I not?" Loki, retaliated hurling forth a backhand of green magic that made him back flip, causing his sunglasses to fall off his head. They hit the balcony hard. Sesshomaru flung out his whip, almost flicking against Loki's ear,
just out of range.

If that God broke his sunglasses he would melt his second most favorite pair of vambraces for it.

Sesshomaru then, on a whim, retracted his whip and instead drew Tenseiga. Sesshomaru longed to practice his swordsmanship against Loki, and Tenseiga needed to get out his still bubbling aggression. He launched after Loki deftly swinging the blade down upon his crossed daggers, the metal shrieking.

Tenseiga warbled, aura brightening.

Loki successfully parried, changing his grip to a reversed one and with honed agility sliced his daggers back at Sesshomaru with quick jabs and clips. Sesshomaru darted to the right, sweeping Tenseiga back and forth between the daggers with practiced precision. Loki ducked low and went for a low slash and Sesshomaru jumped, aiming for an impaling vertical strike downwards on Loki.

Sesshomaru plummeted with surprising speed and Loki magicked verdant magic beams at him. Shielding himself with his blue youki, Sesshomaru slowed him by a fraction in his dive.

A fraction is all Loki needed as he tumbled with a Fox Demon's grace to the left and Sesshomaru flipped. Sesshomaru landed softly, but with purpose. With renewed zest, he twirled Tenseiga to a new grip, preparing to close the distance to Loki when he heard an incoming projectile.

Sesshomaru, in a flash of silver hair contorted his body into a back bend, slicing up and over his body with Tenseiga, striking the metal object from the air. Sesshomaru slowly blinked, staring upside down at Barton, Stark, and Thor.

A fork. No doubt thrown by Barton, only he could accurately attack him with such a projectile.

"Fancy Pants, let's play some darts." Sesshomaru blinked quickly this time. Loki must have truly upset the archer for him to seek him out so. Sesshomaru fluidly spun back upright and picked his sunglasses up from off the ground. He inspected them before placing them on his head, relieved they were undamaged. Loki's armor would remain unscathed. For now.

He sheathed Tenseiga quickly and Loki magicked his daggers away, standing beside him. Loki hadn't said anything yet. So, he must be hoping he would accept Barton's invitation. Loki obviously left it to him to...assuage or...Sesshomaru inwardly cringed...cheer up Barton?

Maybe his father had been right about something. Maybe he had chosen his friends poorly.

"Fine." Sesshomaru stated simply. He had no idea what he was agreeing to, truly. Barton's mind, judging by his crossed arms and tense neck muscles, spun with confusion and defensiveness.

Stark eyed Sesshomaru as if a meal, which made Sesshomaru's ears lift. He would keep his quarry waiting. It would entice Stark more, and give himself time to think about his churning emotions.

He desired Stark, that was not a deniable emotion. The other emotions he currently experienced: tension, zeal, bliss, respect, disquiet, and awe, all in varying quantities and intensities, outright distressed him. Since Stark kissed him, a distinct clamping of his lungs occurred when he thought of him. It almost was as if he stood at the edge of a cold, dark sea, debating to step in or not.

Sesshomaru never hesitated, why did he now? Even when he told Loki his exact intentions?

Thor shifted and he darted his eyes his way. He read Thor's aura easily, his issue was one he ascertained long ago, jealousy. Sesshomaru lowered his ears, Thor's and Loki's issues with their
family had been long percolating and they needed to sort them out before this Titan came.

In order to defeat such a foe, they needed to not only focus, but collaborate well. He would work alongside Loki flawlessly, with Thor he could manage, if he kept his distance. The scry still haunted him despite his best rationalizations. Yet those two Gods working together? Incompatible. Thor clearly brimmed over with envy over their spar, why Sesshomaru couldn't be sure, he rarely sought out Loki to spar when he knew them in his time.

Thor envied lost fraternal bond perhaps? They only had themselves, and Odin, to blame.

"Alright Katniss and Legolas, I'm gonna go down to my workshop, and work on my containment field." Tony turned, and Sesshomaru's eyes widened in apprehension. Did Stark think his agreement to Barton's proposition pushed aside their loose coupling arrangement?

He couldn't decline now though. No matter, he would just collect Stark whe-

Stark winked at him. He blinked back. An acceptable exchange. In a few hours' time then Stark would seek him out.

"Ah. Yes, good idea Stark, Sesshomaru informed me of your studies of his Youki and toxin. I may be of some use." Sesshomaru's heard Loki respond, oblivious to his own brother's emotions. Both Loki and Stark left the balcony, side by side, speaking about his barrier. Loki could help Stark in that…blacksmith forge? He had knowledge of its inner workings? No, most likely he would meddle or wheedle Stark's thoughts out of him.

'Curse him and his ulterior motives, he set this Sesshomaru up.' Sesshomaru's youki spiked in him to alert Loki he knew about his ruse.

Loki didn't even pause in his stride.

"I shall go entertain Lady Rin, and regale her of tails of her Lord, my brother and I. You must recall the Scorpion Demons!" Thor announced and Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side slightly. He remembered their extermination fondly enough, it was a time were all three of them were on good terms and fought together to achieve victory.

"Darts are this way, Jaken is already down there." Barton offered and Sesshomaru looked back once to the horizon, the helicarriers finally bringing most ship out of the harbor. He had not obliterated it entirely.

'Ryukotsusei held captive by the Titan, could his spirit be the only one, or were there others? No matter.' Sesshomaru turned back to Barton and followed him inside, thankful that the noxious fumes of 'Tabasco' had wafted out.

Sesshomaru followed a swift moving Barton down to the training room. He had not missed that since Barton hadn't acknowledged Loki just a few minutes before, and he lured away Jaken. That meant he was headed for a trap. Ice water laced in his veins, these insufferable humans, and the difficult Gods and their games!

"Lord Sesshomaru! I am here to bear witness to your victory against Barton in archery!" Jaken announced, and he regarded Jaken curiously. He had never held a bow in his life.

"Yeah, big league darts. I figured this would be a lot more fun, when was the last time you shot?" Barton held a rather complex bow with wheels on its limbs and punched his arm forward quickly to release it. Sesshomaru, undoubtedly, in theory, knew how to fire a bow.
"…" Sesshomaru decided to decline to answer and simply squared up to Barton.

"What, cat got your tongue?" Sesshomaru's brow's furrowed, what exactly did he mean by that?

"Lord Sesshomaru! I have told Barton of the great victories you have had leading archers into battle. He will not hold back against you Barton!" Sesshomaru sighed through his nose. Of course, he did.

"I hope not!" Barton, without even looking, or remotely squaring up to the target smoothly rolled out the bow plucked the main string back, and hit a target in its direct center in the upper right corner of the room. "Now, if you're rusty, I'll allow you one practice shot." Barton held up one finger and pointed to a bow across the room.

Barton's mood had lifted, so he wanted to showcase his talents.

"This Sesshomaru has never practiced archery." Sesshomaru locked eyes with Barton who dropped an arrow he was twirling between his fingers.

"What?!" Barton choked on air itself.

"….uh…hehe, clearly my Lord does not have needed to ever use a bow before to best a human like you Barton!" Jaken squawked and Sesshomaru turned back to his retainer. Jaken hopped back and forth, taking too much enthusiasm in this exchange.

"Jaken. Explain your behavior." Sesshomaru demanded mildly. It was unlike Jaken to brag so much towards people who had clearly treated him well. He would antagonize Inuyasha and his team of agonizing humans, but they dearly deserved it. Especially that coddled fox kit.

"Jaken here bet me his new headphones that you'd best me in a game of archery." Barton laughed. "Today is my lucky day, won a bet against Nat, and now against Fury Jr." Barton fired at another target nonchalantly and struck it dead center. Fury Jr?

Sesshomaru knew the archer's talents, he needn't show off as such.

"Jaken, have you been using me for your own personal gain?" Sesshomaru flexed his talons in a ruse of an attack. He wouldn't actually punch Jaken for this. Before in the Western Lands this would have resulted in him being pummeled. Now he just saw Jaken's boldness as…perhaps just antics. He would fool Jaken into thinking otherwise however.

"My, my, my, Lord! I would never use you! I am your humble servant, I merely wished to preserve your honor! Barton said he would give me more meat!" Jaken groveled lowly and Sesshomaru understood. So, the archer promised Jaken more deer. He could barely fault his retainer for that. It had been a while since they had hunted.

"It's alright, Jaken." Sesshomaru lowered his ears. He eyed the grip Barton had on his bow. It was a strange shape and had…multiple strings. These new bows were nothing like the ones he had back in his time.

"Why have you never fired a bow before? Jaken said that you commanded like, battalions of archers and Steve caught me up on some of your history before." Barton twirled another arrow in his nimble fingers, like a Horse Demon would blades of grass.

"This Sesshomaru does not explain himself." Sesshomaru defended impassively. Barton snorted.

"Well, now I'm just going to judge you harder." Clint's smile mimicked Loki's a little too closely
Sesshomaru pursed his lips.

"It was forbidden by my father, along with spears and halberds. It was seen as a waste of time."
Sesshomaru admitted stonily.

"Forbidden? Weren't you…uh….aren't you a general? Why would those be a waste of time to
learn?" Barton inquired and Sesshomaru fought the urge to roll his eyes. He didn't necessarily
blame the archer for not understanding his father's reasoning's for his training, but it didn't make it
easier to explain.

"Tell me, Barton, what do you assess my strengths in battle are?" Sesshomaru approached the
closet silently, regarding the weaponry that hung there, various firearms that he did not recognize, a
few bo staffs he did, a badly balanced practice sword, and more complicated bows.

"Speed. Agility. Close combat awareness. Crazy badass brutality." Barton clipped off quickly and
matter-of-factly. Good, Barton had observed him well. He would be most useful in the impending
battle. Sesshomaru turned to Barton, clicking his talons to produce toxin.

"And tell me, Barton, how many of those qualities best suits a long-range weapon, like an archer?
Or a pole-arm?" Sesshomaru quizzed and Barton instantly caught on.

"None. So, you weren't even allowed to fire a bow because it didn't suit your natural talents and
skills?" Barton at least caught on quick. Sesshomaru nodded and continued, it was time to explain
his situation to safe face in front of the archer that he so sorely lost it to.

"Indeed. I was to fight as closely to my opponent as possible. Odin would not waste time in having
Thor study strategy, and Queen Frigga would not instruct Loki how wield a broadsword. My father
similarly trained me." Sesshomaru provided an analogy that made Barton's chiseled face crack
open in an amused smile.

"Yeah, big guy's strategy is usually 'point me to my tazing target'. And I can't picture Loki with a
broadsword, he'd say it lacked finesse or intrigue." Barton nodded, knocked back another arrow and
released it into a human shaped target where it's mouth would be.

"Correct. Odin raised Thor to be a warrior; Queen Frigga, smartly, had Loki become a strategist." Sesshomaru plucked an arrow from a nearby quiver and threw it at a target. It wavered off course,
and struck the target, but off to the side, far from the center. His father…Sesshomaru's fangs
lengthened. What a fool, what a complete and utter mess of a Demon. Maybe that Gem of the
Greater Cosmos had ended up corrupting him in the end. He ran off for that human woman and left
him with a crumbling legacy and a mutinous family.

A legacy now left in the hands of the almost decimated Wolf Tribe. Hopefully Prince Kouga,
uncultured as he may be, has at least taken on the Lord Regent title in his absence.

"Odin didn't train Loki, his mother did?" Barton inquired, shifting the topic of conversation. Barton
wouldn't know such information about Loki, he debated how much he should tell about his
friend…a friend who most likely was doing something devious with the current object of emotional
torment.

"Indeed. It was Queen Frigga's idea to have him study with me, though I only met her a few times.
Odin did not think it proper his Queen to mingle with Demons, even my father and I." Sesshomaru
learned from Rin about how Frigga lamented Loki's treatment. He waffled between having a
neutral and positive opinion of Queen Frigga. She allowed Odin far too much latitude, though she was certainly more helpful than his own mother.

"Loki's a mama's boy, good to know. And your dad, what raised you to be a…?" Barton prompted and Sesshomaru had even forgotten he hadn't fully explained his father. Sesshomaru thought it should be obvious now.


Barton stiffened and Jaken managed to pluck the arrow from his hands and scuttle away with it. That definitely waned the archer's good mood, for what reason Sesshomaru didn't know.

"My Lord has slain many enemies, even without a weapon! He once slew a Fire God with a technique he perfected himself!" Jaken approached a target and threw the arrow at it, satisfied it stuck.

"And I thought my relationship with my father was unhealthy. At least mine allowed me my fuck-ups." Barton admitted, retrieving another blunted arrow, firing at Jaken's feet, causing him to jump. The arrow ricocheted away harmlessly.

"Waaah Lord Sesshomaru! I'll show you human!" Jaken exclaimed. Sesshomaru deadpanned a flicker of a gaze at Jaken, Barton was merely game playing, but in a roundabout way Jaken enjoyed the affront. Jaken took up the staff of two heads and approached a hanging tube.

"I did mostly as I pleased." Sesshomaru shrugged and Barton abruptly jumped in the air. Sesshomaru to dip his ears in alarm.

"Watch out Fancy Pants, you just shrugged. Next you might even dance." Barton sliced a smirk that eerily reminded him of Loki, again. Sesshomaru didn't move a muscle at Barton's declaration. Was he… becoming so familiar with the archer that he allowed such a slip of composure?

"Now that you've loosened up Mr. Popped collar, I'll show you how to shoot. I know we hafta have a heavy weight compound bow for you…" Barton strode to the equipment closet and Sesshomaru uneasily shifted to the side. A human teach him something? Nonsense. However, Barton's aura had brightened considerably, which implied Loki would stop his own erratic behavior.

Sesshomaru concluded a capricious, irritable Loki would be far worse than entertaining Barton. Of all the humans from this realm, aside from Stark and Polly, he preferred his company.

"Take that Chitauri! Bow before mighty Demons, Jaken, and Lord Sesshomaru!" Jaken hopped and from the old man's mouth of the staff a column of fire flared out and caught the large, leather bag on fire. Jaken danced in a circle around the flaming bag which began to smell like a tar pit and fill the room with smoke.

"Is there...anything about your weapons that make sense? Swords that talk…severed heads that shoot out fire. That was Steve's special one, he'll be crushed." Barton grabbed a bow which, unfortunately, had many accoutrements that Sesshomaru could not place. Barton coughed as he opened a window to vent the black smoke.

When the bag finally fell to the ground, Jaken doused it with water with the other female head.

"Bakusaiga has taken a shine to you Barton. One day she will tell you herself." Sesshomaru responded, being purposely a shade vague to vex the archer. Barton just shook his head.
"The last thing I need is voices in my head, again, or like Tony 'sixth sense' Stark." Barton watched Jaken slip and fall in his own water puddle. Sesshomaru raised his eyebrows at the remark. So, Barton and Stark had a humorous relationship? Jaken squawked and began to beat the scorched bag with the staff as if it offended him. Jaken had indeed gotten expressive in this time as well.

Before the aloof Demon Lord realized it, Barton held a complicated bow in front of him in his calloused hand.

"Let's see you thumb your nose at your old man and have some fun." Barton jostled the overcomplicated bow a bit.

Fun?

Something told Sesshomaru that Barton would enjoy it far more than he.

He tentatively grabbed the bow. Why was he listening to these humans again? Curse you, Loki.

Barton pretty much skipped in excitement as he pivoted behind Sesshomaru to show him which string to use, where to properly rest the arrow, lifting his elbow higher, adjusting his stance, moving his bow hand. Barton murmured reminders and moved his hips with his hands some.

It was then Sesshomaru realized he allowed Barton to touch him, multiple times, in various places on his person. None with intimate or salacious intention, but close enough Barton definitely got his long hair caught in his facial hair stubble.

Sesshomaru, Lord of the Western Lands, had become accustomed to humans. More than just accustomed in Stark's case. Well, a select few humans from a realm where humans with intelligence and actual strength resided and thrived. He would allow it.

"Ok, let'er fly." Sesshomaru squinted barely. Archery simply didn't sing in his bones naturally. He was thankful Loki and Stark were not present to witness his awkwardness. He swore if his arrow flew less true than that priestess Inuyasha let subdue him he would melt the bow.

Sesshomaru, unsure of an absolute triumph, let loose the bow string, mindful of his talons.

With a twang, the arrow hit in the chest of the human shaped target, not dead center, but a killing blow nonetheless. He counted it as an improvement from the Priestess, though there was no way to prove it.

"Hmmm." Sesshomaru's eyes glimmered. Seeing the result of his arrow placement strangely satisfied him. He imagined he hit that aggravating Naraku through with the arrow, which made his fingers itch for another arrow. The next he would imagine his father, he fought a wicked grin.

"Lord Sesshomaru you are a natural! I am so proud to serve such a versatile Lord!" Jaken praised and clapped.

"Not bad for a first-time Fancy Pants, I just helped you lose your archery virginity." Barton congratulated, handing him another arrow mockingly. Sesshomaru would not stand for such an implication, especially when Barton had been making similar insinuations between him and Thor earlier.

Sesshomaru knocked it, straightened again, and with a thrum of bowstring the arrow hit closer to the center than before. Witness your superior son, father! And before Barton could say another syllable regarding his improved aim, Sesshomaru flit in front of the archer whose brown eyes flew open wide in surprise.
His brown eyes didn't beguile him like Stark's, they lacked a certain roughness, and a keen, chaotic intelligence he craved.

His cockiness, his intelligence, his ever alert and calculating mind thrilled him.

"You seem eager to allude to erotic activities involving me. Do you truly desire me, or am I merely a practice target for your true intended?" Sesshomaru levelled neutrally at Barton, hiding all humor. If Barton were to game play with Jaken and himself, he would play back. Besides, it was time for Barton to divulge his true reason for bringing him down here.

"Whoa. No. No. You're….uh…fine? You're just um, not my type. You know, I heard Nat calling me, I should probably go." Barton stammered, face flushing a mottled red. Good, let him be rattled, that meant he was correct. Sesshomaru took another sure half step closer, to further disconcert the archer.

"Enough." That caused Barton to stop. "This Sesshomaru is no fool, you did not request my company to merely practice archery, nor did you request it to glamour me." Sesshomaru noticed out of the corner of his eye that Jaken had stopped to watch in rapt attention. Jaken had been getting oddly concerned over a possible dalliance with humans.

Barton turned back and ran a hand through his hair and exhaled deeply.

"You gotta stop Loki." Barton finally sighed, shaking out his arms as if he had just carried some extremely heavy weight. Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed, his crimson lids folding down a little. Did he just command him?

"Explain." Sesshomaru prompted cautiously. Loki could indeed be a rather grating nuisance, and at times in his past he had spurned him for his forwardness. The last conversation he had with Loki in his time was in front of the sacred tree Inuyasha had managed to get himself pinned to. He lost his temper with the God, when in reality he had been correct about his father. Sesshomaru simply didn't want to hear it from Loki.

Loki had a knack for doing exactly what you needed in precisely the way you did not wish it.

"He is messing with me. He is playing all these games, and I am done. I don't like him; I want out. Help me tell him to find someone else to bother." Barton clenched his jaw and grabbed his own bow which he had rested against the nearby wall.

"Ha! How does it feel archer?! All you humans have been playing games with my Lord, and now that Magic God gives you a dose of your own medicine!" Jaken announced and Sesshomaru summoned his pelt and coiled it completely around Jaken until he was nothing but a large, white, furry pile on the floor.

"You dare lie to this Sesshomaru?" Sesshomaru warned and Barton strung another arrow and lackadaisically let it loose into the center of a target in the upper left corner of the room.

"I'm not lying. He crossed the line. I'm done." Barton bit out angrily, voice low like a wounded animal. Loki….what sin have you committed now? Sesshomaru sighed through his nose, he had thought that Barton had been receptive to Loki's advances. Maybe Loki's quicksilver tongue had become too slippery even for him and he offended the typically thick-skinned archer.

Barton unleashed three more arrows, each with impeccable accuracy and increased passion.

"I see." Sesshomaru stated. He refused to pry into affairs that were not his. Curiosity of others private thoughts did not tempt him like it did Stark or Loki. Barton would share what transpired.
with him if he trusted him. Also, if Barton truly wished to associate with Loki no longer than that was his decision.

It didn't mean that Sesshomaru preferred it that way. He could not deny that Loki coveted the archer in a way that carved deeper than any other lover Loki had pursued before. Sesshomaru had not personally witnessed Loki tangle his emotional temperament so intensely in the preservation of another's before.

"No. You don't. You know what he did? That…that… jackass kissed me!" Barton now had grappled a whole quiver of arrows and one by one, twang by twang, he struck the center of the target.

Sesshomaru's eyes shot wide.

"and I slapped him for it!" Barton finished firing the last arrow and Sesshomaru did something he hadn't done in one hundred and eighty-three years. Sesshomaru couldn't help it, it came out rich, low, and deep like an underground waterfall.

Sesshomaru laughed.

'The masculine, battle-hardened assassin who complimented my decapitation of the Chitauri had retreated over a kiss? And he slapped Loki with an open palm strike, like some irritable damsel? To think I had surmised that Loki had dishonored him with a scathing remark, or found the loose thread of his confidence and unraveled it like a tapestry!' Sesshomaru's fangs glinted and eyes watered at Barton's despair.

'These confounding humans, to think I must to help lead them to victory against an armada who can cripple Ryukotsusei, threaten my defenses, and keep Loki! They cannot even handle the slightest physical intimacy!' Sesshomaru had trouble catching his breath. Truly. The last time he had laughed so hard was when that Phoenix Demoness who seduced Loki ran off with his clothes at the lake.

"That's it. I'm giving Nat my man-card. I just got the most stoic, aloof guy on the planet to laugh at me. I bet you haven't laughed since the civil war, and you're laughing at me." Sesshomaru heard Barton's disbelief and it didn't aid in repressing a single tremor from the Demon Lord's chest.

"So, it's stand-up comedy night and no one invited me." Sesshomaru paused in his laughter to see in the doorway Stark standing there, arms crossed and eyebrows lowered.

"Tony! I've never been happier to see you. You can take over here, I'm going out. Bye." Barton fled the room before Sesshomaru could blink the excess moisture from his eyes. At this time Jaken had finally pried himself free of the pelt. He whisked the pelt away.

"What happened here?" Stark inquired voice rushed, almost blocking his exit from the training room. Sesshomaru hadn't the slightest idea of what he was speaking. Stark's heated gaze knifed through his skull. Puzzling. Wait, the fire. Stark did detest it, at least he did when he lit the cooking fire on his roof.

"Jaken will repay Rogers for the damaged…hanging…container." Sesshomaru had absolutely no idea what it was, but it was surely damaged beyond repair. Jaken picked up his discarded staff and dusted himself off.

"No, that's not…forget it. Just. Forget it." Stark turned on his heel and left as suddenly and as unpredictably as he came. Sesshomaru fought a dense ball of ice building in his chest and his ears
lowered. Stark fumed in anger at him, so it wasn't the fire?

Stark had the uncanny ability to render him stupid.

"Lord Sesshomaru, can we go get meat please?" Jaken brushed white fur from his new garments and Sesshomaru willed the upward tug of his lips downward. Barton would succumb to his true urges. If he wanted to ardently reject Loki, it would not have been with a light slap.

Loki had his busy hands full with the quirky archer. Good.

"Yes Jaken." Sesshomaru motioned for Jaken to follow him, his own stomach empty as well. As much as taking Stark to the Quinjet and showing him how Demons tumbled, he had a responsibility to his retainer to provide him with game. He required a fresh kill as well.

"Lord Sesshomaru, these humans are more unstable than the ones Inuyasha travels with!" Jaken grumbled and started forth. Sesshomaru nodded.

Sesshomaru debated finding Stark and demanding he explain his outburst, but ultimately decided against it. Perhaps, again, against his better judgment. He would give Stark some time to collect his temperament.

With Jaken in tow, he left Stark tower, giving instruction to Thor to put Rin to bed in their new quarters. He glided down from Stark tower, bounding here and there across the panes of glass on the skyscrapers at a leisurely pace with Jaken tucked in his pelt. Barton had informed Jaken at dinner the whereabouts of the butcher who gave him the venison a few nights prior.

He found the establishment easily enough, his adaptation to the written language in this time had greatly improved, and with pathways easily labeled he found 'Hank' the butcher, procured their meat, ox meat, and exited the shop.

"Oh my god! It's him! It's Mr. Nirvana! And E.T. is with him!" Sesshomaru froze, in front of him was a group of approximately thirty-four humans. What in the Four Lands what did they want? Why were they all screeching like Inuyasha's priestess?

Lights flashed in front of his eyes and his slit pupils constricted. He threw his youki forward to stagger the humans and hastily vacated the premises.

"Mr. Nirvana who are you really?!" Sesshomaru heard as he clutched Jaken and bounded away from the encroaching humans. With a grace unimpeded, he soared to his favored tower and sat on its scalloped ceiling listening for the wind. Bakusaiga and Tenseiga both hummed quietly.

He and Jaken unwrapped their raw meat and began to eat quietly. Sesshomaru took out his listening device, and put on Nirvana, and turned on the speaker so Jaken could also listen.

"My Lord, what do you intend to do about all these humans?" Jaken finally asked, while the song 'Drain You' played quietly, almost drowned out entirely by the voiceless wind.

'I'm lucky to have met you
I don't care what you think
Unless it is about me'

"I do not know Jaken." Sesshomaru admitted. He had shared with Jaken long ago that he did not have all the answers, though Jaken still acted as if he did. Jaken gobbled down the last of his cut of meat, balling up his paper wrapper in frustration.
'It is now my duty to completely drain you
A travel through a tube
And end up in your infection'

"We should leave, my Lord. We should leave and not look back. We can just wait for that magic gate to reopen and go home!" Jaken swung his small green feet on the antenna of the building. Night already hung heavy and cool in the windy sky. In a way, Jaken's words filled him with unexpected melancholy. Not because Sesshomaru thought Jaken hated the humans of this realm, but because Jaken didn't. 'The worst threat to have was one too close to kill.' His father taught him those words long ago.

'Chew your meat for you
Pass it back and forth
In a passionate kiss'

"I promised Stark I'd stay. You know this Jaken." Sesshomaru finished his meal, and he knew this particular answer disappointed Jaken. His dimmed, unfocused yellow eyes told him volumes.

'From my mouth to yours
I like you'

"Do not forget my goal Jaken, to seek out the strongest of beings, duel, and slay them. You will see this through with me, won't you Jaken?" Sesshomaru, with a talon, flicked his retainers head causing him to wobble unsteadily on the antennae, scrambling for purchase.

"Ah! Yes, my Lord! For we are the last of the Demons here!" Jaken set his yellow eyes in determination and Sesshomaru flashed his fangs. Yes. Yes, they were.

With that admittance, he made his way back to Stark's fortress, the night lit by the harsh lights of the metropolis made him long for the stars.

Immediately upon setting down upon the helipad he knew Stark was waiting for him in the velvet shadows.

He handed Jaken Bakusaiga and Tenseiga. Jaken didn't need to know that his Lord wanted him to check up on Rin.

"You sure know how to keep someone waiting. Wasn't sure if you'd be back." Stark exited the darkness under the left wing of the Quinjet.

"You left this Sesshomaru in the training room. If you wanted my company, you should have requested it." Sesshomaru calmly responded, closing the gap between them by half. The breeze toyed with his long hair like water would a willow frond.

"I don't like the feeling I'm interrupting something in my own tower." Stark, dressed in a tight black T shirt crossed the helipad and Sesshomaru tilted his head. Interrupting?

"This Sesshomaru merely entertained Barton." Sesshomaru attempted to explain, he had no idea why Stark suddenly disapproved of his contest with Barton when he had been there to see him accept it. Stark drained him sometimes.

"You've been doing that a lot today. Entertaining. I watched you play tag with Bruce, zumba with Loki, and, um, my favorite, up close and personal training with Clint. Am I just uh, your in-tower entertainment too? Is that why you've been messing with me?" Stark rubbed the back of his neck uneasily and Sesshomaru straightened. He hadn't seen his actions in that light.
'So, Stark had used Jarvis to observe me today. Why would it annoy him if I had helped Banner or learned archery? Why would he compare our intimacy with what I did with Clint? The only things remotely in common the two had was that Clint stood beside me so closely I still smell him on me….‘ Sesshomaru put the pieces together. He smelled like Barton.

Did Stark think he was purposely making him jealous by using Barton? How…unreasonable.

He would fix this.

Sesshomaru, wordlessly, reached out and grabbed the human, a species he was raised to hate, and feverishly brought his lips to his own. Sesshomaru had to taste his addictive human being again. His youki pulsed and sparkled within him.

An inherited vice indeed.

"This Sesshomaru meant no offense. Your yapping is indeed unnecessary." The Demon Lord murmured into Stark's ear, mirroring his words to him right before he stepped into the Quinjet for the first time in the desert.

"Enlighten me. And, again, most things I like about me are." Stark replied, biting Sesshomaru's ear, his breath tickling his ear canal. Sesshomaru dragged a fang and his tongue down from Stark's ear to his neck.

"I am enlightening you." Sesshomaru murmured into his neck. Stark's hand loosely fisted his long hair and pulled him back.

"Question, one for one." Stark offered and Sesshomaru, like a shrike, dove down upon his open mouth, owning it. His actions should answer any questions Stark should have.

"Stark." Sesshomaru pulled away, annoyed, piercing his brown eyes, which shone dark and glazed in lust and smoldering anger. "Do my actions not convince you that I seriously desire you?"

Sesshomaru voice, laced in longing, dipped low in seriousness.

Stark's eyes cleared, like he woke up from a nightmare and Sesshomaru claimed his human on his lips again. His facial hair scratched his own mouth pleasantly. Initially, he had thought he would mind it, but he didn't.

Sesshomaru wasn't exactly sure when he had shredded the offending shirt off Stark but he knew it was because of his growing need to be as close as possible to him. His chest hair, coarse and curling over his broad, hard muscles tightened his groin. He grazed his claws down his neck, following with his own mouth, lips kneading his pulse point. He heard Stark sharply inhale.

He smelled up close even more tempting, all musk, sparks, and spice. Sesshomaru's emotions spiraled into an unanticipated frenzy. Lust. Caution. Desire. Hesitation. Awe. Fear.

He nearly moaned when Stark took his left ear in his mouth, nibbling and sucking its pointed edge with madness. Sesshomaru's knees weakened. He had never had a want for any being like now and he was slightly perturbed at his own voracity.

He barely remembered growling and picking up Stark by his curved backside, his calves wrapping around his torso, carrying him into the open Quinjet. Sesshomaru removed his own buttoned shirt and sunglasses with delicate, but quick care and set them aside with their shoes.

They both stood facing each other in the muted blue glow of the arc reactor and emergency lights.
'This man, this genius who can fabricate technology beyond my own mind's design, who plays enjoyable question games, who can fly with a suit and power his own body with artificial means would understand my appreciation. I will make him see my inclination. He will quiver beneath me and soften like sand.' Sesshomaru quirked a corner of his lips.

Sesshomaru advanced and threw Stark down on the cool metal floor of the Quinjet with a metallic thud. He massaged his lips down from the juncture of his jawbone and neck, down to his hairy, enthralling chest and further South.

He was rewarded with a gasp and he carefully raked his fangs down his muscled midsection.

Sesshomaru was caught off guard, again, when Stark grabbed his head and brought it back up for a desperate, messy kiss. In that splintered moment, Sesshomaru swore Stark regarded him as something otherworldly first, weapon second.

Sesshomaru hadn't ever remembered being so intimately wanted, so singularly desired, and he didn't know what to do, except try to reciprocate with equal fervor.

He plunged his tongue deep into Stark's teasing mouth, searching for any misgivings and finding none. He wanted to know how he tasted, he wanted his spicy scent to be all over and inside him. His bearded jaw scratched his bare one. He felt Stark trace his markings on his torso and hips with his eager hands, scratching them, attempting to mark him.

Sesshomaru broke apart, breathless, and sliced open Stark's pants and undergarments with a twitch of a talon. Stark didn't protest when he traveled further south once more, leaving a trail of nips and kisses and with a quick tongued relish, took Stark's hardened length in his mouth. He vacuumed his lips against his cock at the very base and rose up tasting him, and did he taste like he thought he would!

Stark encompassed everything musk, electricity and salt.

The human moaned and with his own need growing, Sesshomaru unsealed his lips around Stark and flicked the tip, claiming the fluid there before lowing back down, his tongue swirling. He extended his tongue fully to allow maximum room for Stark's shaft.

He sucked hard, as if to siphon life out of Stark and lowered and raised his head at teasing speeds. He made sure his fangs didn't graze his delicate skin; he also made sure to attend to his neglected sack.

Stark's worn fingers through his long hair and this time fisted it hard. Sesshomaru growled, the hum of his lips on Stark's cock made Stark's whole body writhe.

He his other hand to Sesshomaru's head, shoving it down.

Stark forced all of himself inside Sesshomaru's mouth, already sealed around his shaft. A ripple of lust zigzagged down his own groin from being controlled. Sesshomaru relaxed his throat to accommodate Stark's full, long cock and wasted no time recovering from the shock.

Stark would know his desire for him. He would make Stark jolt alive with energy. He would prove it again and again, over and over if he had to. He came up, tongue lining the sensitive underside of his shaft. Stark trembled, cursed and groaned, and Sesshomaru's eyes lit up in victory.

Stark, one hand still fistig his hair, the other behind his head, shoved the Demon Lord's head into himself until his lips and nose pressed deep his fuzzy base again. Stark pulled him back, to fully fuck the Demon's mouth.
'He thinks he can dominate this Sesshomaru does he?' Sesshomaru, through his bangs, cut a glare to Stark. Before Stark could shove him down again he snaked a hand down to his base, and cupped his sack, brushing a dulled talon at his entrance, circling, applying pressure with his fingertip, teasing yet promising.

Stark let go of his hair with a strangled plea and he changed his method of attack.

He shifted to the side and lowered down, and with his free hand began to stroke up and down on his cock as he nipped and sucked the tender area on Stark's inner thigh. His thigh opened wide on reflex and Sesshomaru attacked the juncture of his spread-eagle thighs again.

He was rewarded with a string of curses and a shutter of his thighs. He grinned through a bite. He resumed his attention to the main objective, noting the fluid again gracing the tip of his length.

Sesshomaru twisted his long hair out of the way as he resumed bobbing up and down at tantalizing speeds, Stark vibrating in pleasure underneath him, uttered muffled cries and he found his own length harden to an almost painful length at the sounds he made come from Stark.

Shocked, Sesshomaru, felt two warm, calloused hands on his shoulders firmly push him until he was on his back on the cool metal floor. He locked eyes with Stark, who gazed down at him like he had discovered something important. Sesshomaru tilted his lips up boldly, and Stark's fiery brown eyes roughened. His open and strong face, painted in lust, smirked wildly with swollen lips. Sesshomaru's member throbbed, tight in his jeans, would Stark continue to be this dominant?

Stark positioned himself over Sesshomaru, opposing positions from a moment ago. Sesshomaru's silver hair fanned out against the grey steel of the jet.

Embers of anticipation trickled down Sesshomaru's triceps and obliques and pooled as a wildfire at his groin. He was always in control, the fully dominant one, it was a relieving change of pace to be at another's mercy, if just for a moment.

"My turn." Stark breathed out and unbuttoned Sesshomaru's jeans. Sesshomaru bucked his hips in the air to allow Stark to pull them off and throwing them like they were afire.

Sesshomaru had been told he was somewhat gifted in the region below but it had been a long while before he wanted his partner to acknowledge it.

"Not commando, but boxer briefs, I so called it." Stark, wide-eyed, smirked devilishly referencing his joke during his first scry attempt weeks ago. Stark pulled the red garment off as well and taking Sesshomaru's aching need into his hand. Sesshomaru gasped, Stark's strong hand fondled him just rough enough. Stark wasted no time, gripping the base of Sesshomaru's cock with two fingers and with a cocky wink he showed his own lack of gag reflex as he sunk down low upon him, hot, wet, and experienced.

Stark proceeded to return the favor and Sesshomaru fought every instinct not to dig his talons into the Quinjet's floor. He writhed and let out a yip when he did a certain trick with his tongue and a finger at his entrance. Stark most definitely heard it because he quickened the pace, and used two fingers to press up against the sensitive skin just above his entrance, causing Sesshomaru to kick his legs out in futility.

Sesshomaru gasped with an icy inhale, Stark's lips and the suction, and the heat, and all those fingers close to creeping inside to him curled his toes and jellied his legs.

'How does he know what I want so easily?' Sesshomaru bit his already swollen lip and he felt his
fangs lengthen. His whole body twitched and knew that he had to regain dominance before he lost it completely.

Swiftly and elegantly as he could muster he took Stark's head in his hands and brought him up to him, locking him again in another heated tangle of lips. Right as he was about to pin Stark again, Stark reached for his pants and produced a vial of liquid.

Sesshomaru, quick as his whip, took the vial with his hand. Their eyes met and the way Stark regarded him with hunger and anticipation made a kernel in Sesshomaru's chest warm.

Sesshomaru would curse himself for his later, but he unleashed a smile at Stark. One that lit up his eyes, lengthened his fangs, swelled up his cheeks and pricked up his ears. The Demon Lord captured his lips again, unable to get enough of his embrace, opening the vial and lubricated his fingers.

Could he stay here? With this innovative human and his forge?

Stark's tongue and teeth brought him to reality as they bit down and gnawed and sucked on his neck.

Sesshomaru applied the slick liquid to his fingers, retracting his claws down as short as he could, slightly painful to do so, but well worth the outcome.

Stark half-sat, half-knelt in his lap, their members touching tauntingly. Sesshomaru supported himself with one arm as Stark lifted up Sesshomaru's chin in his hand.

Sesshomaru's allowed the human to study him, exposed. No other diversion of his had ever held him like this, had their thumb caress his jawline, had their eyes peer into his as if to unlock his mind.

"I want to do terrible things to you, beautiful." Stark huskily murmured. For a still moment, Sesshomaru's parted lips dared not emit anything, afraid, if for some absurd reason Stark would leave.

But he did the opposite.

With a forceful grip on his jaw, Stark crashed down on him with a bruising kiss, drawing blood from Sesshomaru's bottom lip with a ragged bite. Their teeth clicked but neither cared too much.

Sesshomaru coiled his tongue in his mouth, intent on showing this human he was far from finished. He would make Stark unspool for him, he would make him pant and flail.

"Prove it, Stark." He flashed his fangs and caressed Stark's entrance briefly before easing one then two of his fingers inside, scissoring them coaxing Stark to relax. Stark continued to crane his neck down to assault Sesshomaru, licking the blood from Sesshomaru's lips.

He had a penchant for his blood it seemed. For seeing him bleed, for making his mark, and it invoked a certain devilry in him that made Sesshomaru's balls tighten.

Stark took back the vial and with a now slick hand, began to pump on Sesshomaru's length alternating with his own. Sesshomaru growled lowly, chest rumbling and he heard Stark chuckle.

"I can't, Christ! I can't make fucking sense out of you. Fuck." Stark garbled and Sesshomaru, in return, inserted a third finger as Stark began to relax, it seemed the human had practice at this. The
reputation he held was quite accurate, he tapped his pleasure spot deep inside him and Stark jumped in his lap.

He was ready, and with a heady stare Stark began to lower himself onto Sesshomaru as he raised up. Sesshomaru threw his head back as his jaw dropped and his eyes closed; Stark was entirely too tight and hotter than a Fire Demon. He never thought a human could make him tremble.

A strangled growl escaped Sesshomaru's lips despite his best efforts of silencing it. Stark let out another colorful array of curses, sounding breathless. Sesshomaru fought vocalizing his own desire, but his resolve slowly crumbled.

His hands roamed across then scratched down the back of human inventor.

Sesshomaru opened his eyes as Stark wince and bite down on his own lip in legitimate pain. Sesshomaru had a solution for that, he captured Stark in a soft, tender kiss, and pulsed a blip of shimmering Youki into his mouth.

"Oh yeah!" Stark gasped and for a moment, Stark's mouth glowed as blue as his arc reactor. Sesshomaru hadn't noticed his Youki and the arc reactor were the same color until now. The Youki went down his throat, and he saw Stark's eyes light up as it relieved any discomfort he may had experienced.

"fuuuuck—" they both shared a simultaneous groan. "You're unbelievable." Stark, with a knowing grin, fully sheathed himself on the Demon's erection below him.

Sesshomaru's gold eyes, raked over in lust, shot open wide. There was no considerable way Stark could feel this good, like the entire cosmos revolved around him.

Sesshomaru shoved Stark's well muscled back playfully down to the now warm and steamed quinjet floor with a metallic thud.

"Stark…" Sesshomaru shuddered fully, growling lowly in his chest at the usually snarky, challenging Stark warped in ecstasy beneath him. "Believe my rapture." Sesshomaru's eyes edged out red with feral glee as he went to his knees, still deep inside Stark, and pushed Stark's thighs wide. His bangs clumped and stuck to his forehead at bad angles but he couldn't care.

He pulled out slowly, watching Stark's eyes, mesmerizing like a cunning creature about to surprise him.

Sesshomaru's skin prickled in exposure, it was if Stark could read him, like a manual and know his next actions. He wanted to have that effect on him.

Stark was safe to be as vulnerable as he was in this moment.

'I will demonstrate my fascination for him. I will make him see me, see all that I am. I want him to be the only one. The only one to all of see me.' Sesshomaru, slowly, began to pump into him, his own cock sliding into the hot, tight friction just right. His body hit Stark's with a thump, a low bark, and a curse. Stark overwhelmed him, this was bliss.

His blue Youki whirled and glittered around him, not unlike a whirlpool, matching the glow of Stark's arc reactor.

The entire Quinjet now bathed in crystal blue, held Stark in its middle, looking as if he floated on water: drifting and appetizing.
His lips tugged upwards, even though his long hair stuck to his back, sweaty and unkempt. His whole being reverberated with youki as he increased the punching tempo. More. he had to have more of him.

Hands planted on either side of Stark, his arms straight and locked, he rocked his hips sharply into him, his whole body rolling like a cresting wave. Sesshomaru's eyebrows slanted in pleasure, his member tremoring from the pressure inside Stark. He angled himself to ensure he hit Stark's pleasure spot far inside him.

"Oh God, Sesshomaru." Stark shouted out in a broken moan as he flailed. Sesshomaru's ears pricked up. Stark said his name. His real name. Sesshomaru flashed a fang. He would make him write it on his body with his tongue.

Stark started stroking his own length as Sesshomaru barely held himself together. It maddened him to see Stark's assertive, intense gaze go hazy and careless, at the compulsion to use his ingenious hands to satisfy himself so.

His elbows hinged like they'd collapse and his jaw hung loose and open. Sesshomaru had never felt so weak before anyone else before. He could erupt deep inside of Stark just crumple.

"I am far worse—" Sesshomaru barked as Stark purposely tightened his entrance around him. "than any God, Stark." Sesshomaru's eyes flashed and Stark's eyes, hazed in lust narrowed as he shot up his own hand and caught Sesshomaru in a violent bite of a kiss. Sesshomaru's lip burst open again, and Stark forced his tongue into his mouth, stifling any protest he may have had.

Sesshomaru still thrusted hard and fast into the human, a power play between the penetration and the kiss. The slap of skin on skin and metal echoed around their pants and moans. Stark's hand laced through his hair, forcing him down into the kiss Stark had trapped him into.

Stark grunted, and Sesshomaru let loose a high, muffled bark as Stark finally let him exhale. Sesshomaru noted his own blood smeared on Stark's lip and it made his erection twitch.

'A mere human could draw blood from me, could have this hold over me, to make me want him to do it more.' He wanted to reciprocate, his pupils constricted as he bucked into Stark's hot opening.

"So am I." Stark smirked and Sesshomaru increased his pummeling pace, harder, faster, it had to be done. He wanted to feel the smack, the thud, the entirety of himself inside him. He aimed to fuck the pleasure spot deep inside Stark and reveled when he convulsed each time from it. On the edge of a great peak of bliss, his cock throbbed, Sesshomaru jerked and he knew he was almost done.

It was then Stark saw his opening.

Stark, in a stellar display of athleticism, brought his calves into the backs of Sesshomaru's knees, forcing them to hinge. Sesshomaru's erection reflexively shot and Stark used the leverage to push up and back flinging Sesshomaru like a pendulum onto his back, on the floor behind him.

Stark reversed their position. He wrangled his legs out from under a dazed Sesshomaru. With fingers already wet, he massaged then slipped them inside. Sesshomaru rainbowed his back up like a Snake Demon, a silent gasp escaping his lips. Stark had been waiting for this. With Sesshomaru prepped he yanked his striped hips up while simultaneously thrusting down.

Sesshomaru's pupils shaved to paper thin and he barked then whimpered. Sesshomaru's mind fogged and unfocused as Stark yelled fuck.

Stark pounded hard into Sesshomaru, as if knowing he would take it. Sesshomaru pressed his hips
into the assault. He craved the friction, his affliction had flooded into full blown addiction.
Sesshomaru's markings danced right as Stark took both of his slim wrists and pinned them next to
his head on the floor, supporting himself with the grip.

"You're mine." Stark panted. He truly liked his wrists.

Sesshomaru's body lanced with a high frequency tingle as his body jolted forward on the floor with
each wet smacking ram of Stark's member into his pleasure spot. Sesshomaru's own neglected
length trembled with the rest of his body. Sesshomaru's half lidded eyes peered into Stark's, hungry
and bright in the blue circling light. Sesshomaru couldn't let himself end like this, trapped on the
floor beneath Stark succumbing to his whims. He had one goal, and that was to show Stark he was
not mere entertainment.

With a burst of twinkling youki, and a barely seen movement, he flung Stark up, and with legs still
trembling launched the both of them into the wall of the Quinjet, next to where the parachutes
hang.

Stark's eyes wide, dark and startled didn't stay that way for long as Sesshomaru closed their
distance, mouth over his, tongues crossed. Stark bit hard down again on his bottom lip as he pulled
the back of Sesshomaru's head past him, going for his ear, tracing its point with his tongue before
latching onto it, as if intent on piercing it.

Sesshomaru's other ear flicked as he pressed his forehead against the cool metal of the wall of the
Quinjet. He pulled up Stark's hamstrings and with a torturous, rapid pace, rammed himself back
into Stark's still relaxed and lubricated entry. Stark's own shaft rubbing against Sesshomaru's flat,
chiseled stomach. Sesshomaru's eyes, squinted shut, flashed open when a strong hand forced his
head back to in front of Stark's, eyes intense.

"You're still mine." Stark commanded. Sesshomaru flashed a fang and drove deep into Stark with a
quick upward pump of his hips.

"Really?" Sesshomaru's voice rumbled deep in his chest as Stark's whole body shuddered, and his
shaft jerked. Sesshomaru's eyes glimmered. Sesshomaru continued to buck into Stark, even after
Stark shoved their mouths together again. His bottom lip swelled and bled again in a new vortex of
pleasure and pain as Stark sucked it.

It was time to prove to Stark how much he wanted to be the one to make his face contort, and body
spasm. They broke apart and Sesshomaru took Stark's length in his hand, still holding him up with
his other arm. He didn't have to stoke him much before it pulsed in his hands.

"Ssssessho Fucking hell!" Stark convulsed and from his length spurted his seed, splattering
against Sesshomaru's abs. The human loosened and softened, placing his damp forehead on his
indigo moon, noses touching, muttering lewd curses. He made that happen. He made this special
inventor climax in uncensored rapture. His own length now plead for release.

Sesshomaru's eyes widened and red bled. All the markings on his body changed to red and grew
jaggedly while his fangs lengthened, masking the vulnerability of his quivering lower body. His
blood flowed hot like lava and gushed through his groin.

"Stark!" Was the only syllable Sesshomaru managed as he hit his peak and unleashed his steaming
load inside of Stark with an abrupt quake. His face lax in unabashed release.

'I could become accustomed to this.' Sesshomaru thought contentedly. He wanted Stark, his
motives clear as the skies in his lands. His lips curved ever so slightly upwards, still roaming his
impish face, memorizing it. He would have him; he would captivate him; he would claim him.

He withdrew from Stark slowly and gently and a bit undignified, collapsed them down on the floor. He did something that he didn't feel comfortable doing until then: lie down. Trying to calm his trembling body, he stared up at his swirling blue Youki and the glow from Stark's arc reactor integrating in a spiraling blue.

The human sprawled out on him, his head rising and falling on his chest with every shaky inhale and breathy exhale.

"Watching you lose control should be illegal, in at least ten states." Stark finally spoke up shifting onto the floor and onto his side. Sesshomaru mirrored him, head resting in his hand, elbow on the floor. He regarded Stark's blue lit athletic physique and his boyish grin.

"You as well make a sight, Stark. I enjoyed our coupling. I'd like to continue them with you."

Sesshomaru's calm voice filled the Quinjet as a warm sea.

'He saw me in a state no one else has. Could it be that Stark may not just desire me for my prowess and abilities, but for all I am? Does he see me as more than mere entertainment as well?' Sesshomaru dared wonder.

"Yeah, same, gotta love a good fling." Stark sat up suddenly, tone high and nonchalant, shattering the moment. He peered down at the Demon Lord like one would a stranger.

Fling?

So, he misread the whole situation. His eyes blanked out and a sensation like Loki's poison stung his gut and veins. Sesshomaru immediately regretted pondering such irrational thoughts, Stark's interest spelled only lust.

Nothing more.

Loki was right about him being a casual lover. He was no exception to Stark. Stark only cared about his well-being in terms of the defense of this time. He shouldn't have hoped for anything beyond it.

Sesshomaru neatened his bangs and hair with his claws, suddenly too visible.

With a flick of a striped wrist Sesshomaru whisked some Youki and dissipated the tacky remains on them both. Stark looked down and grinned.

"Nice trick, uh or should I say tricks, Sailor Moon." Stark stood, grabbing a bag hidden in the Quinjet.

'Tricks? So I am merely entertainment.' Sesshomaru's ears flattened, but said nothing. His real name now forgotten, the warmth in his chest cooled into snow. Sesshomaru shouldn't have expected anything different yet it still collapsed his insides into a hollow and dim pool.

He reined his Youki in, the shimmering blue faded instantly leaving only the faint glow of the arc reactor and a few lights of the jet. Sesshomaru stood as well, gathering his garments and putting them back on wordlessly. Steeled and frozen, he avoided gazing in Stark's direction.

"I had a feeling you would make an abstract art project out of my clothes so I brought a spare set. Ingenious, I know." Stark winked and Sesshomaru regarded him neutrally, putting on his jeans and tucking his sunglasses on his head. What was he supposed to respond with?
"Well, I'm going to go clean up and catch some z's, you and Bambi got a big day tomorrow that I am unhappily stuck in the middle of." Stark tugged on a shirt and some pants and walked out of the Quinjet briskly without looking back.

Sesshomaru stood for a moment, in the now quiet stillness of the Quinjet. He hadn't expected the outcome of their coupling to leave him yearning for so much more, and not just of the carnal variety. His mother once told him: 'Wine cannot get you drunk, but passion still can. Tread lightly my son, as you are quite the lure.' She'd be laughing at him if she were here: he allowed himself to become enamored. How unwise.

He had told Loki he was not looking for a mate in this realm, so it disturbed him that he found himself vetting Stark for the position. How perplexing and horrendously inconvenient.

He was indeed going mad.

Unsure what to do, he turned on his music device, finding the appropriate song: 'Sometime Around Midnight' by the Airborne Toxic Event.

'And so there's a change
In your emotions
And all of these memories come rushing like feral waves to your mind
Of the curl of your bodies, like two perfect circles entwined
And you feel hopeless, and homeless, and lost in the haze of the wine'

He sat alone, silent, and head bowed, listening to humans, again.

Chapter End Notes

yeah....don't kill me, this was painful to write.

TL
Tony and the Press Conference

*(*)

Tony booked it from the Quinjet as if paparazzi invaded it.

'Don't look back, don't look back, it's like an explosion, like the Jericho. You aren't cool if you look back.' Tony strode his way down the roof access. Except, that man he just practically ran from in the Quinjet wasn't a weapon like his Jericho.

He wasn't just a weapon, but he couldn't be anymore than just a fling.

A ripping, tearing sensation shredded Tony's lungs. He left him alone, his ears flattened down. He told him he wasn't anything to him.

And that was true, because it had to be.

"Cerberus and Sirius are good, Stark, for a mortal." Loki circled the lab table with a lazy grace. His arrogance level reached Defcon level two.

"I know you're impressed, you can admit freely. Jarvis probably won't record you saying it. Jarvis?" Tony rolled back, looking at the handsome God who regarded them all as idiots. Which, of course he wasn't. He didn't manage to fall through a pothole in Asgard and get a invasion started via the sewer of the universe.

"Probability of picking up Sir Loki's—" Tony stopped him. Loki's eyes glinted green, rolling them up to the speaker system.

"Did you just call him Sir Loki? No. Reclassify him as Horns like we had earlier." Tony would let the prissy Demon Lord keep his 'Lord' status, but he was not going to have someone else in his tower called 'sir' just because of his daddy issues with his last name.

"Yes Sir, the probability of picking up Sir Horns..." Jarvis started again. And Tony silenced him. Loki's ego was too big for his liking already. Loki already had explained, with no shortage attitude, where the rest of Thanos' fleet was.

As if he didn't know proxima centauri's location and how many light years away it was.

Why did he let him down here again?

"Yeaahh...So, Horns, all we have to do is load the canisters into the probes that SHIELD had in testing which I, uh, improved. They should have just come to me in the first place for because a monkey with an erector set could have done better. I mean, really, they have me, genius billionaire, funding SHIELD and they didn't use me for your space program?" Tony began to ramble. Loki made him uneasy. He needed another scotch for the Demi-deer prancing about his
lab, thankfully not touching anything, but still.

Everything about Loki screamed he was up to something.

"The plan before we figured out someone in SHIELD is a secret admirer of Thanos, was coordinate with the helicarriers. Now I have to call in some favors from some old launch sites I used to sell rockets to. Once these probes are launched and reach get the altitude of GPS satellites, about 20,000 kilometers, boom: Early Warning Line for most of the globe." Tony leaned back and took a huge bite out of his pastrami sandwich, which he washed down with a scotch on the rocks.

No way he was going to have Mexican right before the activities he planned on having with the hot as hell Demon Lord. Even if he didn't plan on catching.

"Yes, it is unfortunate about the spies...though I am sure Miss Romanoff and Clint will root them out. I can hardly do so without Director Fury accusing me of 'not behaving'. Though you do realize that only Sho and Jaken can feel the alert from the proximity barrier? Yes?" Loki's eyebrows furrowed, looking at the hologram of the small, spherical canisters and the space probe system named D.E.M.O.N.S. 'Distant Extraterrestrial Military Orbital Neural Signal.' Tony's eyes lit up in victory and he managed to not give away the shit eating grin he wanted to wear.

He put down his sandwich and pulled up the Tower's Arc Reactor.

"Ehhhh. Wrong. Your better half, really, much better, he settled for you, has been harmonizing his youki with the tower's arc reactor." Tony cockily raised one eyebrow, shoving it down Loki's throat he knew something about Sailor Moon's youki he didn't. Soon, he would figure out a lot more about him.

"The arc reactor's energy output has risen by eleven percent. That's because of the uh....well, positive ionized nature of his youki, along with the long wave length of it acts...well I'm not getting into it. The tower, can now be a relay for well, any threat and instantly communicate with it as long as it falls within the barrier." Tony flexed out his fingers, showing the energy output levels of the reactor on a hologram.

It flabbergasted Tony. He thought he had perfected the arc reactor, that it couldn't get any more efficient without becoming unstable, but here Sailor Moon was doing it...just by strutting that perky ass around his tower.

"... Most unexpected. What of your own reactor?" Loki's eyes narrowed and Tony had really hoped that Loki wouldn't be that perceptive. So much for that dumb idea.

"...Same principle applies. I think the feeling I got when the spaceship crashed the party early was the proximity barrier alerting me." Tony didn't miss Loki's mouth split into a smirk. "Spill Rudolph, why are you down here? You haven't cared about what I've been working on, but now all of the sudden you do? I don't buy it." Tony's voice got low and he took another bite of his sandwich for effect.

"The dragon spirit, Ryukostusei, poses a serious problem." Loki paused, which struck Tony as odd because he usually knew what he was going to say next. "Pure demonic spirits cannot be killed by this dimension's weaponry, nor my magic. And they can't be seen by mortals nor Aesir." Loki finished and Tony rolled his eyes. Yeah, no kidding this thing is a problem, he can literally see ghosts now.

"Well, I saw it, and heard it. Oh yeah, I see ghosts now. Sailor Moon ghostbustered it with his physics defying sword, N*sync. You helped make the thing, I was actually hoping you could tell me
how it can cleave thour—" Loki was on him in a second, which made Tony push back from his desk, startled. He took his scotch with him.

"Splendid. So, you will be useful to me." Loki's voice lit up and attempted to hand Tony a bottle.

"I don't like being handed things, and I don't like your tone. You are useful to us, not the other way around. Didn't you listen to Admiral Rocky road?" Tony frowned, face shadowed and took a sip of his scotch. Loki simply huffed, but it rang false, his fingers fidgeted like he was a lot more pissed off than he was letting on.

"Is that how you see Sesshomaru as well? As someone who is simply of use?" Loki snapped. Now that jettisoned Tony to a new level of pissed, possibly the same level of Loki.

"Burn in hell." Tony slammed his scotch glass on the lab table, nearly cracking it. Scotch splashed onto the table causing Loki to back up.

"Who was it who abducted him and his family and brought him here? Oh, that's right, you did, so he could clean up your mess! You used him. You want to know who else is going to use him? It's going to be Fury. Fuck, Steve already has! Not me. I told him to not go after the spaceship solo. So, no, you are useful to us because you owe the Avengers, and Sesshomaru to be useful. He doesn't owe us a damn thing." Tony grilled into Loki's eyes like a particle laser. His blood pressure had skyrocketed. Pursed his lips together and fought the urge to take the socket wrench to his left and knock some teeth out of that coy mouth of his. The fucking nerve of this guy.

Loki frowned his hard mouth then sighed.

"I am aware Stark, you made your point. See to it that you don't." Loki's magic flooded his eyes black for a second which was why Tony paused in calling out his thinly veiled threat. "Now, onto business. That vial contains the poison I enhanced my dagger with when I clipped Sho in the shoulder with it. It's quite potent, yet most effective against Demons." Loki changed subject fluidly and Tony eyed the vial suspiciously.

"Ookay…why would I want a poison that could seriously hur…oh. The Demon ghosts? You think it will work on them?" Tony held the vial up to the light. It was a noxious pink color.

"Perhaps. I've never had to banish demonic spirits before. The poison may taint the demonic spirits enough to render them vulnerable to this dimension's sight and defenses. There will be more of them Stark. We cannot leave it to Sho to slay them alo—" Loki was cut off by Jarvis sounding an alarm.

"Sir, fire in the main training room, should I prepare Dum-e?" Tony wordlessly brought up the feed from the training room and Loki chuckled.

"No, how did the gremlin get a flamethrower... is that his creepy staff? What are they doing?" Tony exclaimed, literally scratching his head as Jaken put out the fire. Maybe he should use Frogger for fire duty.

Sailor Moon was talking freely about his dad...to Clint? They were that close? His dad wanted him to be what?! Perfect? He knew how that felt. Thanks Howard.

"Clint is teaching Sho how to use a bow and arrow. See for yourself Stark." Loki wryly smirked and gestured to Clint who shaded Sesshomaru, moving his hips, with his hands? He just brushed his probably not clean hands down his arms.

He did not just grab his wrist then murmur in his ear.
Tony lost his appetite.

"It's a wonder what asking, and pressing, for the right questions does Stark." Loki examined his nails. Tony wanted to put him through a wall.

"I have no idea what you're talking about. Don't you have something useful to do? Like leave me alone? I got what I wanted." Tony bit back at the fake-nonchalant Demigod before him, pointing to the poison. Loki's eyes rolled to him like ice in a glass.

"Not yet. You want Sho. You want him so bad it burns you, doesn't it? You want him to stay, but Stark, how much do you really know about him? Or is it... that you're afraid, too cowardly to ask and get that close?" Loki flashed his teeth wickedly, but Tony saw his green magic spike and his nose scrunch. He was obviously jealous of Clint getting too close to the 'Sesshoki' bromance.

So, Loki wanted to dance to this tune?

"You know, projecting your own emotions for him on me isn't going to fix your issues. Oh, and you might want to get that 'burning' sensation checked out. It may have something to do with your earlier 'performance issues'. Hint, it's never a UTI." Tony took a generous swig of his drink right as Sesshomaru hit the target.

He wanted to rip the bow from his hands and plunder him senseless, in front of Clint if need be. He wanted his hands all over him, sweeping his satin skin, gripping his hard muscles, and scratching over his stripes.

"Ha! You know Stark, your games would be a lot more fun to observe if your partner knew he was playing one." Loki sneered and Tony balked.

"Oh, he knows the rules, just look at hi—" Fuck he fell for Loki's trap.

"For a self-proclaimed genius, Stark, your delusions render you slower than Volstagg." Loki shook his head and he swore the frown on Loki's face wasn't in pure disdain. He almost looked like Steve when he saw a WWII documentary, but before Tony could call him out on it he vanished.

'Loki was just projecting. Who cares that Sailor Moon is bonding with Clint? That they share family secrets and he lets him touch him. If I care at all, which, I don't, it's only due to the rising youki in my arc react—Clint. Did. Not. Just. Make. A. Virginity. Joke. A bad one at that. And Sesshomaru is letting it slide? Game on.' Tony didn't even realize he had stormed out of his lab until he caught the gaze of Thor deep in the middle of story time.

He reached the door of the training room to have the air plundered from his fiery lungs. Suddenly, the fire snuffed out to a sour, chalky powder that dried out his mouth.

His gorgeous Demon Lord...his pissy, prissy, aloof, boy-toy was bent over in laughter, silver hair shimmying everywhere.

Not a chuckle, not some snicker, full blown laughter. His laugh alone could sell cologne. It could stop a f-18 Hornet, it could solve terrorism, and prove the theory of dark matter.

And he didn't cause it. Clint 'not-funny-on-a-good-day' Barton did.

Game over.
He planned it perfectly. He made sure to meet Sailor Moon on the helipad, no beds. No awkward waking up to a Demon Lord beside him, with his hair in his mouth and him hogging the pillows or even that fur thing. He even remembered the lube stashed extra clothes in the jet in case Sailor Moon found him so irresistible he tore the clothes off him, which he did.

Tony loved being right. He did. Really. Even about this. Yup.

'Operation: Hit It and 'Sho'get it' started off without a hitch. Casual, mind-altering sex with a potentially dangerous individual encapsulated everything Tony wanted in his sex life.

Except it also, at the same time, wasn't.

When Sailor Moon came back from his adventures with Lucky Charms, his blood simmered. Anger swelled in his ears and before he knew it he was laying into him. He didn't even remember what he said exactly, except he wanted a clear explanation of what his Demon Lord was up to with Clint.

It pissed him off that he was pissed off. He shouldn't be. Sailor Moon was only to exist as another notch in Tony Stark's bedpost. He shouldn't be anyone that he could possibly be possessive over!

And like Clint, 'I didn't even graduate from high school because I joined the circus because who seriously does that' Barton stood a real chance against Tony 'genius, savant, philanthropist, sex-god' Stark.

Then Sesshomaru dropped a bomb on him. Tony knew bombs.

'Do my actions not convince you that seriously desire you?' His arc reactor amped up as if he shot up anabolic steroids. His pulse raced. The valves on his heart couldn't keep up.

His Demon Lord wanted him back. His fangs raking down his throat, tongue plunging in his mouth more than proved it. Sesshomaru openly admitted he wanted to bone him. The first thought through his head should have been a loud 'Game, set, match. Tony wins'. Instead a quiet happiness rippled through his frontal cortex as the phrase: 'Thank Tesla's ghost'.

Operation: 'hit it and Shoget it' had officially hit the first of many snags.

First snag: Instead of feeling a head rush power trip of winning their game, his head cleared with relief with a slice of anxiety. He could have any pair of legs in New York, and Sesshomaru probably could as well, but they chose each other. Weird and startling.

The second snag: Sesshomaru skyrocketed him into an entirely new echelon of sex. Not even with Pepper, whose relationship he mangled and torpedoed, did his mind contort into such sublime highs and his body rush into pleasure hungering lows.

Tony's body hummed in response to being treated like a temple, his toes may have just stay curled if he didn't force them into shoes. Everything about the Demon Lord rumbled with energy about to spark and explode. For him.

Nothing, not dementia itself, could erase Sesshomaru's angled face, eyebrows slanted, eyes closed, and mouth slacked as a collapsed oval in the throes of a passion unbridled from Tony's mind.

Tony roughly held his sharp, pointed chin like he would a new invention. He examined the man he was currently straddling. His lips were parted, full, and bruised. His bangs messily criss-crossed across his blue moon and his pupils dilated in lust.
What happened next made Tony almost go into full cardiac arrest. He couldn't believe knew his heart couldn't possibly be beating this erratically over something as simple as this.

His gold eyes, amber in lust, softened in vulnerability.

He had to confirm that he wanted to own him. He had to mar him. It's why he had to bite him, had to leave his mark. Flaw him permanently, show everyone he belonged to him.

He had to prove that perfection didn't exist, and even if it did it would be boring as hell. Entropy, disorder, chaos, Tony couldn't get enough and Sesshomaru had it in spades. His father demanding stagnant, predictable perfection from such a dynamic, feral, predator was a joke.

Though, he seriously wouldn't be down for Tony had in mind. He wouldn't trust him with doing all the terrible things running through his mind because he knew Sesshomaru had to have read it with him staring at him like that.

'Prove it, Stark.' But Sesshomaru was down. He did trust him. He made zero sense. He existed as a total contradiction, calm on the outside, chaos on the inside. A human eater capable of terror on a genocidal scale yet adopted a human girl and a worthless toad sidekick. And then this: crazy dominant one moment and pleading to be taken the next.

Tony nearly came early when he heard Sesshomaru moan when he licked the Demon's own bloody lip and crushed him down with another kiss. He had to be inside and all over him at the same time. So, he made the impulsive decision to give him the Tony Stark 'blow-profession'. Because Tony Stark didn't do 'jobs' Tony was a pro.

Tony threw him on his back with his lips parted in surprise, eyes molten in lust, his hair fanned across floor of the jet like a photo shoot. His entire body and mind open to him, and it drove Stark to a thirst for dominance he didn't know what do to with.

No one as powerful as Sailor Moon, who could knock a spaceship out of the sky with a point of a sword, should look at him that way. Like Tony wielded the power to wish him out of existence. Like he had the power to dissolve him with a swirl of a tongue. It scared him, who did this Demon think Tony Stark was?

Again, he thought this whole thing would be a less intimate and a lot more macho.

It's why when he noticed Sesshomaru tremble when he was plowing Tony good and deep that he pulled out a move he hadn't used in a while. Tony threw him to the floor and let him have it. He didn't hold back and by the Demon Lord's reaction he wanted to be fucked and hard. He actually barked and whimpered! If Sailor Moon was up for being submissive; Tony Stark could show him how it's done.

Though he got points for creativity for turning the tables on him with his youki and shoving him against the wall. It remained one of the few times Tony didn't mind being shown who was boss. After all he didn't own the Quinjet, so if the Demon Lord wanted to dominate him there, more power (please) to him.

But the sex went beyond dominant and submissive.

Tony knew whatever they shared wasn't just sex to the Demon Lord. He doubted that the stoic Demon let just anyone see him like that. At least Tony liked to think so. It was the first time that Tony had ever let anyone hear the noises he garbled out, or see him be so far out of his mind but wholly present at the same time.
It was also, of course the first time he had ever trusted anyone take him. He always topped…until him. He literally let him in.

And he had not expected to love being the person he let in, to see his usual pristine self, disheveled in rare desire. Tony was overwhelmed by curve of his swollen, abused lips, his flushed, smooth cheeks and his wild, yellow eyes after he made Tony orgasm. Sesshomaru acted like he just achieved a new level of greatness by making him cum. It took him aback.

Tony never felt taken aback.

In response, he pressed his sweaty forehead on his and let his nose touch his. Tony meant it as admission that the smile was too damn much. Which, looking back, was like the least badass, manly, thing he may have ever done.

But he didn't care, even though he should have. Maybe he didn't have to put on that strong front in front of Sesshomaru. Even when he was with Pepper, he always felt like he had to have the reins.

Only when he leaned back noticing the primal recklessness of the guy whose dick he was currently riding did it click. Sesshomaru trusted him with his raw, torn apart, crimson eyed, jagged striped, tangled hair, exposed wreck of a guy. In return, he trusted him with the crumpled, 'jewel' powered inventor who sometimes just wanted to curl up and not stand on his own two feet. Sometimes.

The third snag in 'Operation: hit it and sho get it' happened when he half-lay, half-collapsed on his chest. He didn't want to get up. He was deliriously ok doing something he did only really once with Pepper: cuddle.

For the first time in a long damn time, Tony's mind fuzzed and blanked out in silence. It hadn't done that since before Afghanistan. He didn't have any buzzing, intrusive thoughts. His mind didn't compulsively whir with thoughts of the toxins, the spies, the end of the world, his responsibilities. Their sex dismantled him down to spare parts. Sesshomaru successfully shut him down. No, more like he let himself unspool like copper wire and let his boneless mass conduct his buzzing body heat.

Tony reached the solace of his empty, cool, dark bedroom. He imagined what it would be like to wake up finding silver hair on his pillow and a striped body next to him before he knew what he was doing. Tony ran a hand down his face. His arc reactor wasn't lighting up the room like it did inside the Quinjet when it combined with Sailor Moon's youki.

Tony's pulse still raced, fearing that exterminating this crawling, invasive possessiveness of his… the ethereal Demon Lord would be hopeless. He ran into his shower turning it on its coldest setting, hard as a post again, he hadn't recovered this fast since college.

Everything the Demon Lord did turned him on, watching him sword fight Loki, blasting aliens out of the sky, him standing there not saying a word to Fury, him explaining his strategies. That. Smile. Fuck, that laugh! One day he'd make him laugh just like that. No better. No. he wouldn't. Because that didn't matter. You didn't have to laugh during sex.

'I can't let this happen. This is all going to be played by the 'Tony Stark's rulebook of how to get laid and avoid emotional entanglements.' Hell, if it didn't work with Pepper, how could it possibly work with a Demon Lord from the samurai era of Japan?' Tony stepped under the cold water,
cringing and cursing.

He hadn't expected Sesshomaru to be so direct in asking that they continue. After that suddenly his world came crashing back down, just like falling back through the void of space. He needed a drink, or a shower, or something, or to get out of the Quinjet like now. Like yesterday. Fuck. Faster, out, away. Now.

For such a brilliant strategist, for someone who could apparently scrynado the future, he certainly had a blind spot for this time-bomb.

'It's why, when he was next to me, head propped up on his hand, like a damn siren in the blue light I had to sit up. I couldn't cave to the urge to reach and grab his sharp jaw in for another head rush. It's why I didn't stay next to him and ask him stupid questions like if he even knew where or what proxima centauri was. Or why was his father such a dick? Where was his mother? Why does only ever wear red and white and love those stupid aviators so much? Or even why Nirvana of all bands?! I don't do pillow talk, especially when there is no pillow. Especially after sex like that. The only reason I'm probably walking straight was the youki he gave me. Which was better than any drug and sent sensations down to my little iron man I didn't know could actually happen.' Tony stood under the water, skin prickling in little bumps, finally soft again he turned off the water and toweled off. A sharp kick of a cramp built up in his chest, the truth.

After the invasion, he would go back to the Feudal Era of Japan. He would abandon him.

Sesshomaru handed him time-bomb and rather waiting to see when it would explode on him, he just sped up the timer and threw it back.

'I had to leave him like that. I had to get out of there. I had to show him who held all the cards, whose name is on the side of this tower. I had to ignore the way his ears sunk and not immediately rush over to bite one, forcing it lift back up again and telling him in no way was he like one of Loki's magic tricks.' Tony stared at his reflection in the mirror, partially obscured as always by the blue of his arc reactor. He turned from his own face, going into the bedroom.

'I had to push him down before he could trip me up. I can't give me up for some stupid fantasy that he will stick around. If it's too good to be true, it always is. I'm Tony Stark, billionaire, genius, playboy, philanthropist and Iron Man, and I am going to stay that way.' Tony dry swallowed an Ambien and fell into bed, mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted.

He ignored the raking urge to ask Jarvis where Sailor Moon was. Or what he was doing, if he took a cold shower too because got hard immediately after as well. Tony slowly fell into a light sleep, knowing tomorrow he would feel one hundred percent better.

And when morning came, he slept in until he felt one hundred percent better. Which meant Pepper came in and forced him out bed, placing a mug of good coffee on the bedside table next to the damaged alarm clock.

Tony sipped the black coffee that Pepper probably had someone ground and french pressed, eagerly. She knew he wasn't looking forward to Lalapalooza that was about to start on his front terrace.

Pepper and Fury said they had to get in front of 'this invasion and Sesshoki thing.' And what better way than to host a news conference with SHIELD, the Avengers, and the two guests of honor: Sailor Moon and Bambi. He had no idea how Steve, Rhodey, and Pepper managed to rope him into this dumb idea.
If the other night was crabpocalypse, this was Sesshokalypse. There was no scenario where this was not going to end in an absolute disaster.

Tony dressed in his other battle suit: a nice Tom Ford number, charcoal grey three piece, good silk. Definitely not like the red and gold silk outfit he had still hanging in his closet. He never got a straight answer out of Sailor Moon about that Jason idiot either. Not that it mattered. Sailor Moon could go around and kiss anyone who he wanted.

He ignored his blood heating up at the thought as he walked out into the chaos that was now Stark Tower, eminent battle arena, the thunderdome. Everyone was probably in a frenzy. It wouldn't surprise Tony if Thor had blown up his blender or Loki had another tantrum at who the hell knows, or Steve wrung his hands over crowd control.

Instead, everyone lounged around relaxed.

This...surprised him. He took another greedy gulp of scalding coffee. Natasha and Clint were hanging out in the corner, dressed to blend in with the press, eating bagels. Bagels! Who could just eat a bagel at a time like this? Fury stood beside Natasha eating…a Mc Muffin? He went to Mickey D's before stopping by for what will be World War Three in front of his tower? Hill and Coulson, again both approachable as a minefield, were Fury's shadows. Coulson and Hill eyed Loki and Sailor Moon respectively.

Bruce and Steve, dressed in his 'bedclothes', lounged on the sofa, watching Steve's Yankees get throttled on mute. Point Break stood in his typical armor though he was joking about something involving scorpions sharing his beloved goddamn pop-tarts with Reindeer Games and Rin.

Wait. Sharing? Point Break and Reindeer Games? Since when did those two make up?

Toady was holding the N*sync and Backstreet boy swords listening to what he had to assume was AC/DC again and Pepper, facing him, held out a black tie to Sesshomaru whose back was towards him but that didn't matter.

Thoughts stilled in his head like an emp had shockwaved through his brain. His breath totally did not just hitch.

A white suit. What was this, Miami circa 2001? But, he had never seen anyone wear white so well. Those legs, that ass, that he now knew the exact curvature of behind that shield of silver hair. Those taut shoulders and…there. There it was. The smallest slice of a crimson slash on a delicate wrist peaking from the pristine white suitcoat. It had to be a Brioni suit. If it wasn't it should be, he'd buy him one for him.

The modern cut of the suit, skimmed flawlessly down obliques and hips he not only gripped but came on last night. The damn suit had to be tailored, probably by his own tailor.

Then he turned to face him. Damnit.

Crimson silk dress shirt, two buttons unbuttoned, Gucci? Tony had to force his eyes up from the creamy hollow of his throat to his completely healed lips. He knew Sailor Moon would heal himself, but it broke his ribcage open that he definitely had bruises and the Demon definitely didn't. His eyes traced the magenta stripes that somehow didn't clash with the crimson shirt.

They didn't clash only because he then realized that the stupid red shirt perfectly matched his stupid red eyelids that fluttered for him last night.

Placid, impassive, aloof, Sesshomaru's gold eyes flashed over to him like radar ping and just as
quickly flit back to Pepper.

Sesshomaru completely opposed Loki who was dressed in a black suit and emerald dress shirt. Sesshomaru even had those stupid aviators on his head.

He and Loki both looked absurd, well separately they looked great, together not so much.

All Tony wanted to throw the sunglasses off his head, rip off that suit, and bend him over his workshop table and pull his silver hair and make him bark and whimper, and smile again. He stifled the urge and the warm tingle in his groin.

'Christ if this wasn't already doomed to fail it is now. They look like a soft-core porno version of Santa and an elf. Damn. Shouldn't have thought that. Not both of them together in a porno, wearing those suits. Think Fury in a dress and heels.' Tony's groin dampened down with the unintended image of Loki taking Sesshomaru from behind instead of him. Loki grinning and Sesshomaru's jaw slack. He shook the offensive image from his head physically.

"You should really wear a tie." Pepper held it out and Sesshomaru regarded it like he would a rattlesnake.

"..." Sesshomaru didn't say anything and looked stoic but Tony could tell he wasn't happy; his ears were down.

"He won't wear it Lady Potts. He likens it to the collars and leads that humans force upon dogs here on Midgard." Loki supplied, eating a pop tart, also not wearing a tie. Sesshoki solidarity alright. Tony pointed to the tie, then pointed to Sesshomaru adding them up. He didn't even think about what Sailor Moon thought about dogs here, but seriously couldn't he act normal for just once?!

"Oh. Ok fair. Tony you need to put one on." Pepper conceded, rare event. Tony looked down, he had forgotten his, well at least he had the suit on.

"Are you two even taking this seriously? We have a press conference in like twenty-five minutes and you look like a joke. I mean red and white and green and black?!!" Tony glare of anger flowed through him as he first pointed to Sesshomaru then Loki. This meant a lot. They had a planet to convince of this invasion and that Loki was on their side.

Loki turned to Tony, eyes glinting in sport.

"Oh, I should don this instead?" and in an instant Loki had on his horned helmet and his typical Asgardian armor. Tony ran a hand down his face.

"No. That's the opposite of what I meant." Tony looked at Pepper appealing to her sense of propriety.

"..." In an instant the scorned fluffy pelt of Sesshomaru unfurled on his right shoulder, the cream of the pelt clashing slightly with the pristine white of the suit.

Tony noted how Sesshomaru looked to Loki and Loki smirked. Another surge of somewhat justified anger jolted through him. He was sticking his neck on the chopping block for team rocket and neither of them cared. All they cared about was their creepy friendship.

"Take that thing off. Can't you just be normal for once?!" Tony pointed at Sesshomaru and his low voice sunk the temperature in the room, everyone turning to him. Romanoff leaned back, crossing her arms defensively.
The pelt then sat on Tony's shoulder and he reached his limit. He tried on vain to pry the coiled
pelt off his shoulder.

"Damnit Sailor Moon. Get this stupid thing off. Does anyone have a lint roller? Apparently, I'm the
only one who cares if today doesn't end in complete disaster." Tony tried using all his strength to
remove the fur and at the last moment it dematerialized and Tony looked at Sesshomaru. His head
tilted and ears lowered in an almost 'what's wrong?' expression for stoic Demon Lord.

"Tony this will be alright. I have stocked the press seats with people on our side. They will only
ask Sesshomaru and Loki questions we have approved of and Natasha and Fury have briefed them
in what to expect. They will only field three questions each. You're a little on edge, you should eat
something." Pepper placated still holding out the tie she was trying to convince Sesshomaru to
wear. Thor held up a pop tart to him.

Tony refused to grab the tie or the pop tart, maybe out of stubbornness or indignation, but he really
did hate being handed things.

"There is no way this isn't going to end in complete catastrophe. No one is going to buy that Loki is
actually on our side and once they hear Sailor Moon is his BFF they will turn on him. This is
insanity and all of us are bending to them and they don't even care!" Tony blew up and slugged his
coffee back and surprisingly it was Thor who turned, expression black as the coffee Tony currently
drank.

"Man of Iron I must announce your reaction is most inaccurate. Son of Taisho and my brother
would not take part in such a spectacle if they not think it serious. You must know how precarious
this is for my brother, and how private Son of Taisho is. Does it matter truly which colors they
don, Loki's preferred green or the Land of the West's red and white?" Thor sat down the took back
pop tart. Loki, startled into magicking away his helm and armor, turned to him in awe. The rest
also looked at him then turned to Tony.

"Fine. Whatever. Wear what you want; act how you want. I don't care." Tony grabbed the tie from
a concerned Pepper. "Just know when this whole thing goes south I told you so." Tony avoided
looking at Sesshomaru, and then avoided everyone as he bee lined to his safe haven, his workshop.
Not even Tony knew why he was this angry. Something inside him just snapped. Everyone was
supposed to be panicking, nervous, on edge! And here everyone was just sitting in his tower like it
was another day at the office.

No one had to live with being both an Avenger and a public figure. No one else had their life, their
welfare on the line. He funded most of SHIELD. He dealt with the press, the mess. And Loki and
Sesshomaru looked completely ridiculous. Like nothing about any of this mattered to them as long
as their bromance remained.

Upon Natasha's request, they created cartridges for Cerberus: the organic toxin, Sirius: the
inorganic toxin, and Blitzen: Loki's poison. Bruce did most of the work on upgrading the toxins
and poison while he worked on the containment field. Bruce handmade 9x19mm parabellums for
her glock 17, some 5.56 x45mm NATOs for the m4 carbine, and some 7.62x51mm NATOs for the
m24 sniper rifle. The ones for the m24 were particularly promising, being that the cartridges
themselves were over two inches long. He also made some arrow-tips for each. Tony noticed a few
from the m24 set were missing, Bruce must have set some aside somewhere for testing. Tony
looked around, pointedly ignoring Sesshomaru's spider silk outfit nearly folded on the lab table,
squares missing.
"Sir Captain Rogers and Miss Potts request entry." Tony sighed heavily, giving up his search on the shells and instead found his emergency tie and single malt he always stashed in the lab. He quickly flung the slightly worn black and red striped tie around his neck when he slammed back a swig of the single malt.

"Yeah send them in. Let's get this over with." Tony deflated, shoulders sinking. No matter what happened he was going to have to deal with the fallout of this calamity.

'It's not that I don't trust Pepper it's just a few weeks ago, my life was exactly something I could handle. I could control it. Now it's spun out of control like a teenager trying to drift a Supra. I had spectacularly dynamite sex with a Demon Lord which turned too complicated, harbored a notorious war criminal, and made potato salad. Well, really Clint made the potato salad. The point still stands, I have everything to lose doing this, and nothing to gain.' Tony began to sloppily tie a single windsor when Steve and Pepper entered, both a bit red in the face.

"Tony, we get it, this is a high-stress situation and this has to go well. But, you putting everyone else on edge isn't going to help." Steve started, gripping his mask like he wanted to smack Tony with it.

"Not to help? It should help. We need to be on edge, on guard. The public is going to see Bambi and Sailor Moon and go nuclear. And where exactly are we having this? Oh yeah, my tower. I alone have to deal with the fallout if this goes sideways." Tony crossed his arms, looking Steve directly in the eye for a challenge, but instead it was Pepper.

"Can you look beyond yourself for a good five seconds?! You are not the only one with something on the line Tony. I have to deal with the board as CEO and explain why Tony Stark is now suddenly helping a God who killed hundreds and destroyed part of Manhattan. Director Fury, Phil, and Maria have to own up to that the God they thought was a villain this whole time really wasn't one. Not even mentioning the fact that Loki has to come face to face with all the people whose lives he ruined and loved ones he killed. Sesshomaru has to stand and watch people treat him like a circus act, which you can only imagine he is really going to enjoy." Pepper stomped her Louboutin stiletto heel on the floor of the workshop, the metallic clang ringing.

"I think; we can let them wear what they want for what will essentially be a firing squad." Steve crossed his arms in turn and Tony rubbed his temple.

"Not to mention security is tight as a drum, Natasha hand-picked the agents. Sesshomaru's public approval ratings are also at sixty-one percent. And according to Fury, the President wants to treat him to a round of golf for thanking him for defending the Nation against an extra-terrestrial terrorist attack." Pepper calmed down and started to properly tie Tony's tie. Tony relaxed, falling into routine and acknowledging that maybe Pepper had a point. Maybe.

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"Hey Cap, this is a Tom Ford, not your bedclothes. Watch the merchandise." Tony pointed to Cap who just rolled his eyes as they made it back outside to the living room to see that the only people left upstairs were Jaken, still holding Nsync and Backstreet boy, Rin and Rhodey who must have just shown up.

"Lord Sesshomaru says that everyone out there wants to meet him and Uncle Loki! Those humans
better be good to my uncle Loki or my Lord Sesshomaru will transform!" Rin informed, watching of all things, 'Independence Day' on TiVo. Tony made a note that they should probably stop having Rin refer to people as 'humans'.

Tony fought a small slice of disappointment that Sesshomaru already have left. Not that he was going to apologize or anything absurd like that, but he didn't exactly want to leave their previous conversation the way they left it. Well, he didn't actually say anything but still.

"Yeah, don't worry Rin, Loki is tough." Steve responded and Rin nodded seriously.

"These humans will be the end of us Rin. Bakusaiga is hissing." Jaken tutted and Tony didn't know what to do with that information.

"Hey Tony, I know this looks like a Charlie Foxtrot but we all got each other's backs. And there is no way this is going to be worse than some of the combat missions I've flown. The public will come around eventually, they always do." Rhodey smiled and Tony scratched the back of his neck. Rhodey stayed behind to make sure he wasn't going to be too unstable.

"Yeah, and if worse comes to worse we can just film all of this into the best soap opera of all time to float Stark Industries after our stock plummets." Tony winked emptily at Pepper and Rhodey as they walked to the elevator and went down.

Outside, in front of Stark Tower, turmoil reigned supreme. The shuttering and flashing of cameras, the howling roar the masses and screeching of tires on pavement assaulted them as they made their way to the makeshift stage, SHIELD agents and other guards in full riot gear held back the teeming throng of the hysterical and daring. Helicopters clipped overhead, Tony bet one was probably Thor's new crush, Chopper Dave.

"Oh yeah, no way this doesn't end in disaster." Tony muttered to himself, guards escorting them to the makeshift stage where everyone else already was, Loki and Sesshomaru standing off to the left, side by side, a breeze teasing their hair. Tony couldn't help but think they looked exactly like their stereotypes: the dramatic Diva God and the stoic Princess Demon Lord.

It was then as they got on the stage he noticed the signs people were waving in the crowd.

'Ve love Mr Nirvana'

'Death to Loki!'

'Thank you Mr Nirvana!'

'Aiens and Gods go home!'

'The end is near! Repent!'

'In Mr Nirvana we trust'

'NYC loves THE NIRVENGERS'

Why did he agree to this again? Tony shoved his hands in his pockets, he had a front row seat to a bloodbath. Some of the people, no doubt, probably drove in from tin-foil hat trailer-park for this event. There was no way he shared a city with this many whack-jobs.

The crowd obviously had a conflict of interest. They, or more likely SHIELD and NYPD's slackest, had divided them away from the press. Tony crossed his arms at both team 'Nineties
grunge' and team 'Death to the Demi-God' thrash, howl, and hurl shoes at SHIELD and the NYPD. What was this? Wrestlemania?

'Super. Great. Let's see Fury pull a rabbit out of Loki's helmet.' Tony took his seat, next to Steve to the left behind the podium. He wished he had an ottoman, or another drink, or half a brain to have relocated this elsewhere. But no, the whole 'Avengers' Tower optics' and 'Demon barrier' had made logical sense at the time. Now, clutched in the deepest bowels of Tony, a cramp formed, and no it wasn't from the spectacular sex with his gorgeous Demon lover...

'No. not his lover. A hot Demon fling. I can admit that freely. He is beautiful, I mean, I only have sex with beautiful people so it makes sense he would be. Who wouldn't get hard from his abs, and the way those fangs of his lengthen when he smiles and his ears that do that twitchy thing. But he is far from the most beautiful fling I've bagged. There was that one blonde model, her tits were bigger…' Tony cleared his throat to throw his thoughts back on track. Tension thrummed in the air like an impending missile strike. His mind shouldn't be in the gutter.

This is why he only did 'hit it and quit its'. He risked enough making it a fling! Really, Sailor Moon should count himself lucky he would sleep with him again.

His eyes landed on the Demon Lord who leaned in to whisper something in Loki's ear. He hated that he hated the way they could stand so close to each other so comfortably when so many people in front of them hated them.

Sesshomaru and Loki surveyed the rabble, untouchable, unreachable, and inseparable. Tony had never seen anything like it, envy scratched his gut and to his far left. Clint, hidden off stage, literally scratched his neck, monitoring the same two men.

Sesshoki's tranquility almost alleviated some of Tony's concerns. Instead he just wanted to take Loki's place, he then forced the treacherous thought from his mind.

'Doused in mud, soaked in bleach, as I want you to be.'

Someone in the crowd was blasting 'Nirvana's Come As You Are' on a loud speaker and some SHIELD goons crashed through he packed crowd to tackle them.

'About-fucking-time-Fury' finally took the podium, firm hands grasping the edges. The crowd momentarily hushed. Tony, for once, was not the object of all the hoopla and was relieved somewhat in that. Though, Pepper should be thankful. Not even after the announcement that he was stopping weapons development, or announce himself as Iron Man, did he attract this much media attention.

"People of this great nation, of this world, I stand before you today, Nick Fury, director of SHIELD, to inform you we made some mistakes. We didn't have all the facts with the Battle of New York, almost three years ago." Fury paused, gesturing to both Loki and Sesshomaru.

"Now we do. The Chitauri we thought we thwarted instead lie in wait to try to invade our planet again. They are led by a warlord who thinks can take our world and that we will simply submit, but they could not be more wrong. They think they know what we are capable of but they have no clue." Fury moved his hands and pounded the meat of his fist into his hand.

"Loki, brother of Thor," Tony saw Loki shift to the side and Thor straighten. "Prince of Asgard, gave us the warning of this second invasion. Without this information, the casualties would have been far worse yesterday." Fury paused, as if daring Bambi to question the whole brother thing. He didn't. Thor couldn't look more golden-boy if he tried, Loki couldn't look more know-it-all if he
tried, and Sesshomaru couldn't look more bored if he tried.

"Or Mr. Nirvana!" Someone shouted. "Yeah Mr. Mysterious!" Someone tattooed girl on some guy's shoulders screamed and the crowd rabbled again.

It was official, it was Wrestlemania.

"The mistake SHIELD, that I, made," Fury continued "was accepting Loki was the one responsible for the attacks almost three years ago. He wasn't. We were played. We should have questioned the gift wrapped Trojan Horse our true enemy dropped off on our doorstep. He, an unwilling participant in the first attempt to try to annihilate mankind, was blamed while our true enemy rebuilt their forces for a second try. He was a scapegoat. A fall guy, and a convenient one." Fury again gestured to Loki and Sesshomaru. Loki had a hand on his hip, expression mild. Sesshomaru simply had his hands to his sides, thumbs hooked in his pockets casually looking out to the snapping of camera flashes.

"Loki suffered the price for his captors' crimes. He purposely failed the invasion to deceive and destroy his cowardly overlord. He now stands before you, with his friend, someone you may recognize as being responsible for defeating the first of many ships our enemy will send to destroy our homes and—" Fury stopped short when Nirvana's 'In Bloom' blared high with static.

'He's the one, who likes all our pretty songs and who likes to shoot his gun.' The ballad screeched out of an amp before another guard arrested another moron.

"Marry me!" Someone in the crowd screamed and Tony just ran his hand down his face.

"Loki...asked his friend, Sesshomaru, Demon Lord, to help defend Earth from people who want nothing more than to see it burn. This warlord, Thanos, may think he can be successful this time around, but he is dead wrong. With our government's militaries, SHIELD, the Avengers, and the Avengers' newest consultants, we will stop them cold. There will be no third attempt, united we can ensure that. United we will stand against this Titan tyrant." Fury straightened, putting his hands back on the podium. Loki and Sesshomaru turned to Fury and up until now he had just mostly seen Sesshomaru's back.

Now seeing his profile, sharp, striking and regal, sun brightly reflecting off the white of his suit, the sheen of his silver hair and refracting off his aviators, he reflected everything a Lord could ever be. A Lord he wanted to kneel before him. He couldn't wait to get him alone again. A Lord he wanted deeply and truly.

Only for sex of course.

"Loki and Sesshomaru will now allow three questions each, any further questions will be addressed at a later date. After they answer their questions, Captain America, Steve Rogers and I will give a quick debrief." Fury waved over the two men and the crowd went from a dormant volcano to an explosively active one. Tony rubbed his temples at the clapping, wooping, cursing, shouts, screams, cheers, and jeers. A mixed bag was putting it lightly.

'With the lights out, it's less dangerous, here we are now, entertain us.'

Someone, again, was trying to play 'Nirvana's Smells Like Teen Spirit' and one of the guards dragged him off. Tony, annoyed by the grunge interruptions, however, remained cautiously optimistic.

Fury's speech and introduction was crafted well. It made sense, he spun it to a 'us versus them'
mentality that never failed to get Americans all patriotic. Maybe this was salvageable after all. Maybe they could get out of this relatively unscathed.

"See, it's going to be fine, Fury is second to none at this sort of thing, once Sesshomaru and Loki are done I'll wrap it up and it will be behind us." Steve, mask on, next to Tony whispered and Tony's gut still churned. All that coffee, the shot of scotch, and nothing to eat with the added stress was a bad idea.

"Well, that was the easy part, now we have to make sure Team Rocket doesn't self-destruct." Tony let out a long exhale as Loki and Sesshomaru stood side by side, Loki on the left, Sesshomaru to his right, facing cameras and a teeming, writhing mass of cannibals looking to eat them alive.

Tony, however, knew first hand just how delicious Sesshomaru could be, and he wasn't in the market to share him with this.

"You killed my neighbors! I'll never forgive you!"

"Mr Nirvana! You saved my little girl in the Park!"

"Is it true we are facing another invasion?! When will it happen?"

"I can't believe you are friends with this guy, Mr Nirvana!"

"Bullshit!"

The guards finally began to get the crowd under control, at least enough for Loki to take the microphone and be heard.

"Good Morning, as introduced I am Loki of Asgard and this is my friend and our ally Sesshomaru. As promised, we shall answer three questions each regarding any topic you may choose. You all have a right to answers and we will provide them." Loki's voice sounded smooth like suede over the booming speakers. Immediately the press rose to their feet, hands up, smashing open like a mosh pit.

Loki pointed to one with a long, cream finger

"Steve Marks from Fox News, how can you think you can be forgiven for what you did to New York?! You are evil! You killed hundreds of people! How can we trust you?" The reporter frothed, and Tony put his hand over his mouth. Oh yeah, great first question to field. He knew Fox News could not have possibly been one of the reporters Pepper told him to pick.

Tony saw out of his periphery Fury restrain Thor who looked like he was about to call Mjolnir. Clint's face turned purple and Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles. Tony also heard Pepper murmur something to Rhodey.

"I ask for neither. I ask that you take this second invasion seriously and cooperate together to rebuff and destroy our enemy. If your ire and resentment towards my forced actions compel you all to stand united against this threat, then by all means fan that flame. I do, eventually, wish to convey to all my eternal hatred for the Mad Titan and that I will stop at nothing to see his demise, and the defense of your cities." Loki recovered and Tony knew they didn't call him silver-tongued for nothing. Loki stepped back slightly to allow Sesshomaru to approach the podium fully.

With a stripe peeking through the white of his suit, his skin almost equally pale, he pointed towards the back of the crowd and heads whipped back like a sea.
"Amy Harmon, Rolling Stone magazine, Dave Grohl tweeted, and I quote 'I want to buy the hero a drink who saved NYC and know his favorite Nirvana song. Nice tattoos by the way, Mr. Nirvana.' Care to comment?!

Tony nearly fell out of his chair, if Pepper told him to call on her she deserved a raise. Tony saw Sesshomaru's ears prick up.

"This Sesshomaru accepts the invitation from Dave Grohl. My preferred songs are Nirvana's Serve the Servants and Drain You." Sesshomaru answered simply and stepped back from the podium, to the right.

People in the crowd started yelling, cheering and jumping and Tony could have sworn he made out another "Hell yah Mr. Mysterious!".

Loki stepped back up the podium, standing tall, eyes set. Resting on hand on the podium and the other by his side, a green wisp of smoke appeared with his fingers crossed. Tony knew Loki would need all the luck he could get.

The next seconds did not grant Loki his luck.

Tony knew weapons, of course. So, when Tony heard the shhhhhrrrrrraaamaaack of the first shot, he almost could tell the exact make and model of the sniper rifle responsible. His heart spiked and knotted in his throat and his spine straightened.

No. Not this.

By the second shot he knew there were two shooters. Loki shot his right arm out to Sesshomaru whose torso bucked back. The m24 sniper rifle, used by the US military and SHIELD. Tony couldn't see Sesshomaru's face. He immediately scrambled to his feet, feeling unbalanced. Why hadn't he seen his whip yet?

The impact of an M24 assault rifle cartridge, depending on the rounds used, would be far worse than what Nat shot him with in New Mexico. What if they used hollow points?

By the third he knew that the first bullet went straight through Loki. Loki's body twisted toward Sesshomaru at a beaten angle. The bullets so far made that sickening 'thuck' noise that most people thought only happened in movies, but Tony knew happened in real life.

Tony planted a foot and lunged towards the twisting blur of white and silver. And now red. He was hurt.

By the fourth, even now tackled to the ground by Steve, he knew Sesshomaru's white suit now matched his red dress shirt. His craned his neck to see the pelt had summoned itself to his shoulder and stuck matted in blood. Sesshomaru's left talons held no toxin reaching back out to Loki.

He caught the side of his face, blood had splattered against his magenta markings. Tony spotted a corner of his slack mouth, and his long hair that he ran his fingers through the night before now stuck, clumped in blood.

He...was really hurt. Maybe more than hurt.

The fifth and the sixth shots sprayed and splattered blood to the floor of the stage just feet in front of him, like someone threw a few cosmopolitans. Were those really necessary?! You made your point!

Stop.
He only heard static and only saw frames of movements. The cold, hard stage beneath him remained frustratingly unyielding. He had to get up. Why couldn't he get up?

'Steve you're too damn heavy, let me up! I have to catch him he's gonna fall. I have to catch him. I tripped him up first; I can't just let him fall.' Tony's thoughts revved into sixth gear, his mind thundering like pistons in a Ferrari V-8 engine.

Usually he could calculate the ramifications of three 7.62x51mm rounds through one man's chest, but he couldn't focus.

Tony also knew trying to overpower Steve to get to Sesshomaru screamed with futility but with instincts redlining, he wrestled anyway. He had to get to him. This was his terrace. His tower. His home. His.

Loki bent like a hinge and spun ninety degrees and collapsed right as Clint sprung to catch him. Crimson had already blossomed out turning his green shirt sticky and almost black in color. Clint lowered Loki behind the podium for cover.

Something in Tony short-circuited. Just before Loki had been so poised, so confident, and now look at him.

Tony contorted his body as Sesshomaru fell straight back. His usual pristine hair now, clumped and red, hung heavy like a wet flag as his body hit the stage with a jarring thud. The pelt disappeared in a poof, Tony cursed, never thinking he'd actually want to see the damn thing. Sesshomaru didn't move and Tony kicked.

Thor gripped Mjolnir, shouting something, face violet in rage. Clint knelt over Loki applying pressure to his chest with strong arms, yelling intently down to the still body below him.

Tony didn't hear any of it, a ringing whistle like playback from a speaker stung his ears. He reached out in vain at the motionless, red stained body who couldn't be mere feet from him. That really wasn't him, was it? He was just fine seconds ago.

Please no.

Tony knew he was yelling something because his throat itched and his jaw already slack when Sesshomaru's head rolled. Glassy, unfocused, and open eyes revealed, parted, blood stained lips. The blood traveled down his jaw. The same pointed jaw he gripped the night before.

The same lips he made bleed the night before. Tony fisted his hand, banging it on the stage.

Bruce charged forward, now blocking his line of sight to Sesshomaru, hopefully not about to Hulk out.

Steve wrenched him up from the stage and his vision whipped across the fleeing, crying crowd. He saw Rhodey covering Pepper, taking her to safety. He shouldn't have let this happen. He should have told Pepper to wait. He should have told Fury to shove it when he wanted it in front of Stark Tower.

'I should have taken Sesshomaru back to my workshop, tore his suit off of him, slammed him down on my table and fucked him senseless. I should have told him I don't really care about the fur on my suit and asked him about the faint scar on his left arm. Instead I left him alone, and the last words I said to him were about how stupid he looked and how I wanted him normal.' The last thing Tony wanted was normal.
Tony knew a lot, he knew that this would end in disaster, but he didn't know how gut emptying it would feel. Maybe it was a good thing he had nothing to eat because he may have been dry heaving. Maybe he wasn't. It was hard to tell. He needed to get himself together. He needed to get his suit.

Yeah. He needed to suit up.

"-ny. Tony. Tony you gotta stay calm, SHIELD is handling it. They already have possible trajectory origins from the shooters." Steve's voice sounded really close by, and it was then that he fully realized they were still running back for cover, back towards the tower.

The world righted, Tony found much needed clarity. SHIELD botched this bad.

"Yeah. Steve. They handled it real well! You called it at firing squad! Now I have a dying Demigod and...you know what, let me go!" Tony heard his suit rip and tear at the shoulder seam and it didn't matter at all. He will tear himself out of the damn blazer.

"Tony, you've got to get inside, once we regroup we ca-" Tony's eyes flamed and he faced Steve head on. Tony's face darkened like the anvil clouds Thor had just summoned. The pressure dropped with air whipping around them. Thunder boomed and lightning streaked like a freight train derailing.

"Let. Me. Go." Steve's face opened in shock and then closed in understanding. He let Tony go. Tony strode back into the fray he knew too well. He called Jarvis. He saw his suit fly down. It assembled on him and he became Iron Man, Avenger.

If Tony thought he felt angry this morning, he was mistaken. If those jeering idiots in the crowd thought they knew scorn, they knew nothing at all. Tony's insides ignited, incendiary like a wildfire, he shot straight up in the air, weapons hot.

He couldn't look down to the stage. He knew Bruce was Sesshomaru's best sho-best chance at...never mind. He had a mission. He was going to hand deliver hell to his next target.

He built some of the best weapon targeting systems after all.

Those shooters couldn't have gotten far. They had to be on either one of two possible floors of the office building. A gunmetal grey and blonde blur rushed beside him, Thor. The sky crashed again, rumbling like a C-130 doing a flyby.

"Man of Iron! We must dispatch of these assassins!" Tony's jaw clenched and he nodded. One person understood, one person wasn't trying to hold him back. They would hunt them down.

'I will avenge him, avenge them. It's in my job title even goddamnit.' Tony heard Jarvis chatter but it didn't register.

Tony, took two of his fingers like a salute and pointed to the most probable location of the snipers' nest, the fourteenth floor of a nondescript office building. The trajectory worked. He switched and he and Thor flew split tactical towards the window.

Two perfect circles had been cut out of the glass window pane.

Tony crashed right in, insides still burning, blood simmering, and bulging the veins in his temples. The glass shattered inwards, wind scattering and blowing over cubicle walls and office supplies. Tony immediately spotted the m24s perched sturdily on their Paradigm SRP Talon mounts.
Both connected to a remote control relay.

'I should have seen this coming. This is on me. I should have had Jarvis scan the nearby security cams. I should have hacked SHIELD again. This just was supposed to be…' Tony cursed something. He couldn't be quite sure what. Thor crashed beside him, radiating the same rage. Thor, cape billowing, made large crunching steps towards the rifles.

"...cowards! These spies may flee, but nigh, they cannot conceal themselves from I, Thor, Prince of Asgard! I will bring them to the full terms of Asgardian justice! If my brother and the Son of Taisho...I shall not rest! All my brother wanted...wants..." Thor's voice cracked thickly and a scythe of white lightning carved the slate gray sky in half.

The spies. SHIELD. Fury. Oh. The things he'd do to Fury over this. He'd cripple everything they had. He'd built self destruct protocols into the helicarriers. He could bring them all down. He would too. Fuck finding the spies in SHIELD, he could just ruin them all.

They touched his stuff. They broke his stuff. They hurt him.

Tony's pulse still drummed in his ears as he approached Thor, bent and windswept. Tony's gut soured like bad milk and he too crunched glass walking up to the guns. His vision swam, he stood on the precipice of a breakdown.

He had to get the remote control computer for a reverse hack. He had to get back to the tower. This wasn't over, not by a long shot. Shot. Cute. Damn you SHIELD.

"I know. We'll avenge them." Tony scooped up the remote control relay as Thor bent down picking up the spent brass, still hot and smoking.

Sesshomaru had managed to deflect a spaceship cannon blast with a payload of a AGM-109H/L Tomahawk cruise missile, so he should be ok from those shots.

Tony walked this fine line before. When he lost his parents, when they water boarded him in Afghanistan, when Obie betrayed him, when he fell from space with the nuke. Each time brought him closer to the edge. At least Thor stood at the edge of the cliff with him.

Tony knew he was on the brink. His lungs shook like an aerosol can.

'He's ok. He's tougher than he looks. I'll go back and he will be ok. In fact, he will probably look bored, like, 'oh is that all you got?' I'll patch him up and he will crack his knuckles and we will have rough sex for hours and his ridiculous blue youki will shimmer everywhere, I'll make him come like five times. I'll bite his pointy ears, hold down his wrists and tell him normal is overrated and that he couldn't ever look stupid, and I'll make him stay.' Tony's insides ashed out, spent. The liquid jetfuel that once raced through his body became a noxious vapor threatening to combust. His vision tunneled, and his mind spun tired and jittery at the same time, like he had gone weeks without sleep and did a line or two of good cocaine.

Expression grim, he turned back towards the window that faced his tower where not minutes ago Sesshomaru told the world, with aviators on, that he liked grunge music. He stood like a white ceramic sword, addressing a city he selflessly saved only to get gunned down in return. Gunned down with his best friend who risked everything to give their planet a chance.

Tony bent down picking up two spent cartridges, and recognized them immediately. The pressure in his chest built up and detonated like a firecracker.

"Cerberus and Blitzen. My organic toxin, and your brother's souped-up poison." His voice didn't
sound like his own and Thor responded with another sickle of lightning striking the street. The spies had been in his tower. His inventions, his weapons, had been taken and used them against him again! And SHIELD did it…no this was on him. He should have never gotten back in the game. No, he should have never let SHIELD in.

A darkness crawled up his spine and into his mind. SHIELD would pay.

Now, it made sense how just six bullets could take out two of the strongest beings on the Earth. What if...he became a one night stand because of this? He really wanted a second chance, he had to have one, at least to ask him all those questions.

'This is why we can't have nice things.' Tony crushed the spent brass in his glove. They both heard the SHIELD sweep team stomp up the stairs and the ding of the office elevator.

They both turned to each other, mirroring each other's stony looks and one with Mjolnir and the other with his suit, they flew back to the tower. Tony wanted to burn something to the ground, he wanted to riot.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for another crazy chapter. I am too too evil to my characters :( I hope all of you had a Merry Christmas!

let me know how you liked this one. Poor Tony!

-TL
'Well. That hurt. They truly did increase the potency of Sesshomaru's toxin. I can honestly hand it to Stark and Banner, they are certainly capable of terrific things when properly motivated.' Loki inwardly grimaced, his mind unable to reach his magic and his body in shock from the three two inch rounds incasing Cerberus.

The toxin jabbed through his veins like thousands of needles, and his nerves twitched his legs and arms. He had a hard time focusing on anything but the pain and a darkened blur above him.

Someone absurdly caught him before he hit the stage. He knew because he hit a strong, broad, warm chest instead of the hard stage. Loki's muscles twitched as he gazed up.

Short hair, tan skin, chiseled jaw, black suit. Not Thor…

Clint? Clint caught him? Why didn't he catch Sho? Surely, he was closer to him.

His mind became acutely aware that Clint was pushing down on his chest, not really helping. Good thing he replaced that protection spell on Clint, or the toxin would have burned him too. Loki concentrated all his mental effort into his optical nerves, urging them to activate. They finally did and locked onto Clint's strong jawed face.

The intense focus and panic Clint's light brown eyes concerned Loki.

The only person he expected to come to his side when he fell would have been Thor. He never would have guessed Clint would spring into action. And he would have chalked it up to his training, but that look in his eyes hinted at something else. Hinted at something Loki couldn't bear to entertain as reality.

After all, yesterday Clint told Sesshomaru he didn't like him and he wanted him bother someone else.


"Focus Loki. Eyes on me. Stay with me, please. You got this; you're tough. Hang on." Clint's voice thrummed like a drumbeat in his ears over his faint pulse.

He lost focus on the rugged, handsome man above him when a curved bolt of white lightning lanced across the sky. Another wave of acidic pain jolted through his body causing all his limbs to twitch and spasm.

"Loki, look at me damnit." Clint shouted as more metallic blood filled Loki's mouth. He couldn't though, his optical nerves were overtaxed as he stared up at the rolling, grey clouds.

'By the nines...this storm, Thor must be extremely irate. How peculiar, I suffered far worse at the hands of Asgard, but I never saw Thor's anger erupt this way. Could it be now he chooses to play
'big brother' again? Ha. Playing big brother to someone he never cared to truly understand.' Loki allowed his eyes to close. He calculated that two of the three bullets had passed clean through. This was fortunate, he would heal faster this way. He would have to heal the massive, ragged exit wounds on his back first.

'Well, at least judging by the howls and screams of these mortals my plan worked. Success there.' Loki would have smiled, but his body had to recalibrate. His mind slipped back into last night.

"Be my light of justice Clint, and I will be your shadow of vengeance." Loki lurched over Clint and he in an instant became an insatiable craving. Clint had crumpled on the ground in a way he never wanted to see again. He had to put himself back together; he had to stand up.

It would be impossible for Loki to laugh at Clint's pain, for it was a struggle he continually went through.

And the way Clint spoke riled Loki. Clint should be the angry, infuriated, over what these treacherous eels did to him! It provoked his black magic to unfurl, viscous, potent, and ominous. He shouldn't let these imbeciles defeat him.

These imbeciles who laughably thought that they could deal with the Mad Titan and be spared his wrath. Or thought the Mad Titan won't warp and destroy them once he gets all the information he wants.

He would be Clint's dark side. He would ensnare and eviscerate everything in Clint's path. Clint, with his sun-tanned, tattooed skin that solidly spoke of all that he had lost, all he had given up for these ungrateful mortals, would shine.

And the way Clint looked at him, like he wasn't an, unworthy, frivolous, crooked, or demented creation swept away all of Loki's resolve. Clint looked up to him like his opinion mattered to him. That he, a caustic, scattered creature, mattered to him.

If Clint, Hawkeye, who was so full of heart, honor, and self-sacrifice for his world could see something of worth in him... maybe it was true. Maybe...he could find something in him that wasn't all wrong.

Maybe he should chance it. Maybe he really did matter.

Loki didn't capture his mouth so much as eased his way onto it like one would slip into a hot spring. He didn't want to rush it, didn't want to devour him. He wanted to empower him, to see if he was capable of creating a small, soft beautiful bond, and not just destroying everything around him in a maelstrom of calamity.

Clint embodied everything luxurious, warm, and inviting. For the first time since before the fall from the Bifrost, Loki let himself fully relax. Clint tasted like hazelnut and cream Loki deepened the sudden, stolen kiss.

He worked his lips against his, getting feverish. He wanted him so badly; he just wanted to show him how much. He wanted to know if it was possible that Clint could admire someone like himself. There was something maybe redeemable withi—

A sharp, flat pain smacked across his cheek and tore his hot mouth from Clint's.

Clint's eyes speared him through and he was right. He wasn't really regarding Clint's feelings into the matter, was he? He was so selfish.

He destroyed their bond. He never knew when to stop. He always had to push the limits. Odin always thought he was insatiable, that always had his own agenda. His effort, his ambition, his risks always ended up falling short or going too far. He never got it right.

"I mean seriously, what makes you think...what gives you the nerve—" Clint started to lay into him and his black magic folded in on itself and dissipated. It was too much to ask for. Too much to ask for Clint to be his light for anything, for Clint to see himself as anything. As worthy.

He only had himself to blame. A violent wave of self-loathing slashed through his gut.

Loki raised from his kneeling position, he didn't kneel for just anyone, but of course Clint wouldn't know that.

He fidgeted his fingers and pursed his lips. He then did the only thing he knew how to do.

With a wisp of blackened green smoke, he fled. He worked the darkness out of him the only way he knew how. Clinching his fists, he threw bolts of black magic in all directions in substorage room 3-b, breaking the cameras and letting the walls and crates smoke and ash.

Memories of blue wires, razor thin scalpels, rivulets of blood, taunts, and his own enfeebled magic dusting around his feet, strangled his lungs.

He wasn't anything anymore, and he should be ok with that. He was at one point, now he wasn't sure. Something was changing within him, and it frightened him.

Loki screamed high and backhanded shock waves of black magic all around him. He didn't feel any better. He spun his magic into wires and lacerated the walls, and even his own fingers and palms split open with lines of blood. He still didn't feel any better. Finally, he fisted his hands in his hair and ripped out handfuls of it. It didn't help.

He still hated himself.

Loki, stunned, opened his eyes, again confused as two strong arms dragged him off the stage. Did he imagine Clint? Out of the corner of his vision he saw Stark fly overhead, followed by Thor, whose storm wheeled out of control. Thor should really learn to control his emotions better...ha, ironic advice.

Yet, this wasn't good, or was it? Loki couldn't be sure anymore, except now at least his magic began to slowly coil back in his chest. He still unable to reach it, could now at least get his body somewhat responsive. Responsive in something that wasn't a stinging, corrosive pain.

He conserved his energy until he was pulled completely out of line of sight from the fleeing media to struggle to get his upper body up. His vision blacked out at the edges, and light headedness set in. He failed at getting off the person who dragged him to 'safety'.

By the Nines, he didn't imagine Clint.
"Loki! Thank God. You—you need to take it easy. Don't worry ok? I've got you, you're safe. We got the situation under control." Clint's voice sounded scratchy and choked as Loki leaned back on his left shoulder.

Clint had taken a mostly seated position with Loki sideways in his lap. Loki turned his neck to face him, and managed a slim grin. His grin fell when he saw the stricken look painting Clint's face. Pale and taut, Clint breathlessly held him up with his tense left arm, bloody right hand still applying pressure to his chest.

Oh, so he had miscalculated. Perhaps Clint took the safety of 'the strategic consultants to the Avengers' more he thought. The 'Lost Creatures' were a team after all. He wouldn't be happy when he learned Romanoff kept him in the dark.

Loki tried to speak, but all that came out was a wet, sputtering, wheeze.

"Don't try to speak, Loki. Save your strength. I'll protect you here until you're more stable to move. Just stay awake for me, stay with me." Clint's voice began to even out and he locked eyes with the distressed archer. His light brown eyes burned into him and Clint managed a tense smile. Clint absently tucked a limp, blood soaked lock of hair that hung loose behind Loki's ear.

The tender gesture swelled Loki's chest warm and light, despite the stinging toxin, Cerberus, tracing through it.

Clint held him in his arms, his body trembling against his bleeding one and his strong left arm clamped around him protectively.

…Norns. Loki almost didn't want to believe what he saw, but he was too good at reading people to ignore it.

Clint cared for him. Maybe not as a lover but at least as a friend and comrade. He didn't sever their bond yesterday.

But, once Clint learned of his operation it would be. He would have wanted to be told, he wanted too, but Clint's reputation and safety mattered more. Now he will think Loki didn't trust him, that Romanoff didn't either.

The price to pay for a successful defense of Midgard, his revenge, and to protect Clint.

"I need—" Loki winced. "to go quell Thor's temper." Loki wheezed out. His magic hadn't returned to him yet. He managed to raise his left arm weakly and brace himself to stand.

"Are you nuts?! Someone out there wants you, and Fancy Pants dead. They almost succeeded! When you passed out back there on me, and your whole body seized I thought I… I can handle Thor." Clint's protest rocked him landslide, but he wouldn't risk Clint getting injured in Thor's barely contained lightning storm. Loki swallowed.

He would have to tell him here what exactly happened.

"I shot me." Loki coughed up some old blood. Though being held in Clint's arms was a luxury he never thought he could enjoy, he didn't deserve it. "It was a ploy Clint. I devised the whole tactic and executed it with help from Romanoff, Fury, Banner, and Sho." Loki admitted weakly and tried his hardest to guard against his chest caving in at the bewildered look on Clint's face. He'd see this as a breach of trust from Romanoff for sure.

Clint's face flashed though confusion, disbelief, and ended with his eyes softening in hurt.
Loki gathered enough magic to begin to heal the two exit wounds, but the toxin prevented much else. His nerves gained enough stability to break free of Clint's grasp and stand uneasily.

"What? Why?" Is all Clint whispered before Loki stumbled out, inelegantly, into the fray. His magic trickled back to his senses and his nerves began to reawaken his fine motor skills. The exit wounds on his back finally knit closed.

Sesshomaru, half draped over Banner's back, tilted his head up towards Loki as he staggered back into the raging storm. Loki breathed an inward sigh of relief.

'Sesshomaru is alright, he was just in a bit of shock.' Loki reassured himself. He remembered the punch of fear when the pelt materialized and disappeared that Sho may have been critically injured. They nodded at each other and he set out to seek a God of thunder whose rage churned out of control.

Loki had never seen such a fierce lightning storm. The roaring thunder and hooks of lightning and ignited everything around it in a tight orb of supercharged energy. Gales of wind blew bicycles, boxes and debris in twisters through the street. Street lights and transformers flamed and burst open, hailing tempered glass, power lines, and sparks onto the street. Loki thought he imagined its blustering, incredible power at first.

It didn't take long to spot Thor. Thor descended down from where Romanoff placed the weapons with Mjolnir illuminated bright.

Loki stiffened in shock. Surely not all of his vindictive ire was meant for him. Thor had thought of him as a traitor, an untrustworthy relation, and deserving of Odin running him through with Gungnir not a mere day ago!

Thor landed a bit away from him and wore visage of rage he had seen only rarely.

"Thor. You must calm you—" Loki started but reeled back, startled when Thor whipped around to him, eyes wide. His face brightened and he charged over to Loki with a speed usually reserved for hunting down Jotun, not rushing to meet one.

"Brother, you live!" Thor's gravelly voice cracked high in relief. Loki reflexively took a step back out of disbelief because the golden light that lit his face held such a stark contrast to the dark storm he summoned. Stark landed, suit on high alert from what Loki could tell, holding the remote-control relay.

"It takes far more than that to kill me Thor, much to most mortals' dismay." Loki coughed out a little blood and tried to heal his more serious internal injuries. Stark approached and his face plate flipped up and showed a bent shell casing.

If the storm was menacing, then Stark was hell itself.

'Oh, Stark is going to murder someone.' Loki had hoped Stark wouldn't have found out about Cerberus and Blitzen until after he explained everything.

"You both need to get inside. There is muc—" Loki attempted to explain before Thor approached him in a gentle embrace. He heard a sharp inhale, akin to a half sob. This one contrasted wildly to the last one in Asgard. Thor's wild blonde hair tickled his cheek and his deep breath calmed the winds of the storm.

Loki returned the hug tentatively. Would Thor never tire of these?
"Brother I thought you were in dire straits! I feared the worst! I am truly relieved. I don't know what I'd do if I lost you. Whoever is responsible shall serve their due sentence on Asgard. I will not tolerate such a transgression. You only meant to help Midgard!" Thor growled lowly. Loki had to fight the reaction that surely Thor should think him stronger than a few bullets that under normal circumstances he could have shielded. Thor finally let go, blue eyes squinting in a radiant smile. Thor was always meant to walk the path of light.

And he the path of darkness. There always had to be the one to traverse the path of darkness in order to keep the light bright.

"Yes, well I'm quite alright. Now both of you, come with me we have much to discuss." Loki waved. He realized, especially after the Star Wars viewing that he would always be the Dark Side. Thor and Clint always the Rebellion, golden hair sweeping in the wind and brown eyes searching the horizon like the heroes they were meant to be.

Loki once hated that idea: why him? Now that he had returned to Asgard and confronted it, he realized he didn't care. He never had a chance to succeed in Asgard, yet he would make this reality his own. He didn't fully own this shadowed destiny of before, but now, in the name of revenge, he could.

"Much to discuss? Brother what do you mean?" Thor's over-reactionary storm began to lighten and ebb. The waves of wind settled down as they made their way back into the tower, Loki noticed he SHIELD agents that guarded them must have been ordered to do crowd control, he saw no one on the street.

"You'll see. It will be far easier explain just once." Loki sighed in relief as his magic trickled through his veins, healing his entry wounds. The toxin, however still prevented him from accessing more.

Stark had not said a word, quite unlike him.

"Are you to say you already know the identity of the assailants? Man of Iron has the control device of the firearms used to wound you and Son of Taisho so!" Thor pointed to the relays and Loki knew that Stark would be able to figure out it was Romanoff who took the shots in his lab before long.

"Looks like you were lucky Loki." Stark's voice sounded like he had been recently tortured. "Is Sesshomaru up and around as well or was he not so lucky?" Stark asked stonily and Loki paused, he said his real name, and Sho's. Loki turned to him.

'His eyes look like chasms. He indeed feels more for Sho than he let on. He would be reacting quite differently if he saw this as a simple attack on his beloved Tower.' Loki noted as the elevator door opened.

"He survived the attack, go see for yourself, Stark." Loki stated as Stark marched into the main room of the main living space of the tower.

A molasses thick silence greeted them as Stark set down the relay devices in the middle of the room. Loki sighed through his nose, on one side of the room stood Romanoff, Fury, Banner with Jaken, Rin and Sesshomaru seated. Sesshomaru's once white blazer was removed and shirt opened Loki could see the entry wounds being healed slowly by Tenseiga, who pulsed blue. His long hair hung tangled still clumped with dried blood.

He looked terrible, but he knew he didn't look much better. His own hair was matted in congealed
blood and his skin pale, almost green, from the toxin and tainted blood. It still raced through his blood stream, but the bite of the string had assuaged somewhat.

On the other side stood, Rogers, Lady Potts, Captain Rhodes, Clint, Coulson, and Hill.

Stark remained standing in the middle as if a ring of fire surrounded him, eyes set on the pale, silent Sesshomaru who now just stuck two fingers in his chest cavity, presumably extracting a spent slug.

Maybe Sho wasn't as lucky as Loki, only one shot went straight through.

'Well, isn't this all lovely. Clint would drill a hole through my head with his hard, brown eyes if he could. He probably thinks I somehow manipulated Romanoff into the scheme. He knows of the necessary monster I am.' Loki frowned, a soft melancholy dripped into his lungs, making it hard to breathe.

He was thrown back to late last night when they devised 'Operation: Sesshoki Down'.

Loki found a shirtless Sesshomaru leaving the shower at 3:49 am. They certainly liked running into each other at this time. Only this early morning they weren't on the helipad, and they were not alone.

"Sho. The time is nigh to discuss strategy for tomorrow's greeting of the mortals." Loki gestured to Romanoff and Banner beside him. Both alert, too alert, for what mortals regarded the middle of the night.

"Hmmm." Sesshomaru flared his youki, drying his sopping wet hair and put on a red t shirt.

"So, that's how you can keep your hair so long." Romanoff nodded in approval.

"Told you, women approve." Banner fired to Sesshomaru who only shook his dry silver hair out of his T shirt.

"As you may know, I have committed a great atrocity to this city. No matter what Director Fury may claim or prove, these Midgardian mortals want my blood or worse. They will not be satisfied with mere words this time. Even my own." Loki started smoothly and Sesshomaru's gaze hardened.

"You wish to have them draw your blood for the sake of misguided vengeance?" Sesshomaru asked a touch suspicious.

"Negative. We are going to give it to them, tomorrow during the news conference. A preemptive strike on ourselves. We will also conduct a weapons test of the new toxin, Cerberus and Blitzen, the new poison Glow Stick gave Tony. If we draw our own blood first it will provide us a number of advantages." Romanoff switched off, Loki noticed they may work too well together.

"Firstly, it will allow us to control how and when we are attacked. Also, it will mostly satiate the mortals' desire for revenge. Thirdly, it will draw out any other dissidents for us to find, and show that security has been heightened. Finally, if you are up to it my friend, by allowing yourself to become a part of this tactic it will align us together as one. Midgard will subconsciously see an attack on myself as also an attack on you." Loki had practiced that pitch. Even if Sesshomaru didn't want to go along with it, he himself would. It would simply be a sounder strategy if he did.
On Midgard, there were a scant few who would care for his passing. Thor would only mourn for the loss of a brother, not Loki. Clint, well, Clint made it quite clear he didn't want his company.

"If I'm going to bleed, I wish for it to be on my terms no one else's." Loki added, knowing that would get through to his friend.

"My proximity barrier will alert me to threats within the perimeter. This seems unnecessary to fear an attack from humans so." Sesshomaru huffed and Loki inhaled sharply. He anticipated this response though.

"Sho, this is my responsibility. My price to pay. Asides, your vigilance is better used for our actual enemy. Not even you, my friend, can immediately respond to an explosion or a rogue sniper shot." Loki explained. His friend's proximity barrier, as far as Loki could learn from Stark, worked best against foes with immediate hostile intent. It may not work against a planted bomb.

"I also plan on using this Operation as a double-blind. Only us and Fury know of Operation: Sesshoki Down. If Fury is our mole, then he will somehow sabotage the Operation. I personally do not believe Fury is our double agent, but if he is then we need to act fast. The rest of the Avengers will be left out of scope for plausible deniability, and the rest of SHIELD will be left out to narrow down our spies." Romanoff expounded, shifting her weight and looking to Banner.

Loki didn't like the idea of not telling Clint. Clint, as well as the others had become rather close to Sesshomaru. Besides that, Clint would most likely see it as a breach of trust that he wasn't included.

"I...gotta say. I don't like leaving Tony out of this. I mean, I'm glad you're including me so I don't...transform..." Transform? Oh, Sho must have really instructed him if he no longer refers to his beast as a different entity. "...but Tony would want to know of an attack on Stark Tower."

Banner stated seriously.

"We aren't including you just so you won't...transform, Bruce. You said it yourself on the Quinjet coming to New York, the public wants Loki's blood. We have to mitigate and control this, and you are the only one with approved access to Tony's lab and you made the ammunition. Besides, Tony would drown himself in his mini bar if he approved of this and it goes sideways, like if Pepper or Rhodes got hurt." Romanoff articulated, turning to Banner.

"I'm just... wary over Tony's reaction when we use him over there for target practice. He's gotten... um... well let's say he is going to care, a lot, if he gets hurt." Banner stumbled a bit on his wording, taking off his glasses and pointing them at Sesshomaru whose ears pricked up.

So, Banner had noticed Stark's interest as well.

"What makes you come to that conclusion? The fact they have matching outfits?" Romanoff narrowed her eyes and tilted her head. Banner held out his hands like someone was giving him rotten food. Then Romanoff looked at Loki who gestured to the freshly showered Sesshomaru and her eyes lit up.

"You're sleeping with Tony." Her voice rose and Sesshomaru furrowed his eye brows slightly. He cracked his knuckles that Loki knew he only did when he was annoyed.

"There was no sharing of quarters. He views me as a casual diversion. Your concerns are needless, Banner." Sesshomaru informed unemotionally, shifting his weight.

Loki's magic condensed and darkened within him. For all of that gaudy holier-than-thou speech in
the lab, Stark went and did the one thing he warned him not to. It shouldn't have surprised him, but he didn't detect a lie from Stark in the lab.

'Far from it. His ire indicated he was deeply offended I would imply such a thing, and his barely bridled jealousy over Clint showed me Stark wanted my friend in much more than the physical sense. I had warned Sesshomaru of Stark's sexual behaviors. Yet, I would not have teased Sesshomaru so if I did not believe that Stark may see him similarly. Pity really. I truly have never seen Sesshomaru's interests so piqued.' Loki contemplated a prank on Stark...maybe he would change all of his human's spirits to horse piss.

"Jeez, Tony, I don't...nope. Not going there." Banner muttered mostly to himself, taking a deep breath.

Now that he really examined Sho, he picked up on his minute tells he wasn't his typical placid self. His gaze never landed on himself, Banner, nor Romanoff, instead it held a fixed spot straight out in front of him. His youki also ebbed lower than normal.

Loki was right when he said Stark was too afraid to properly court Sho. Loki and Stark had opposite problems it seemed. Clint had been so disgusted with his own advance he struck him for it. Not his best moment, he had mostly tempered down from the incident, but it still knotted his gut cold like ice. He had never been rejected in such a violent way before. Well, not since Suzaka that Pheonix Demoness, but she didn't really matter to him.

Loki knew that most mortals were heterosexual, but he didn't expect Clint to be so revolted by his kiss. It was clear now the archer he ached for wanted nothing to do with him.

He had teleported from Stark's lab in time to hear what he said to Sho in the training room. It...stabbed his insides more than he cared to admit. He could shoot a bow, sometimes he even did it for leisure. But he'd never get the chance to do it with him.

Clint saw him for the monster he really was.

"...well that is what Tony is known for. This doesn't change anything, we will proceed." Romanoff cycled through the new information in her head. Sesshomaru's ears lowered, not unnoticed by Loki.

"Ok Natasha, are you seriously implying that they won't care that we are gunning these two guys down? I mean Loki and Clint do their...spar thing, and..." Banner persisted and it really began to irk Loki. He was missing the point, and he was wrong.

"I can see it now! Your patriotic and gallant Captain weeping over my prone body while Stark plays a requiem. Shall I have Thor gather some lilies for when your Fury says my eulogy? Spare me. While they may be alarmed at Sho's fall, it won't be for long. Midgard's mightiest should be able to stomach some blood. The Mad Titan will certainly spill more of it." Loki's words rolled off his tongue flawlessly and Sesshomaru nodded slightly. Loki said what he meant, but was purposefully callous. If these mortals thought that the battle against the Mad Titan and his armada would be without bloodshed, they were wrong.

Besides, it was not like Clint didn't already hate him.

"Sentiment is for the privileged, which we aren't at the moment. If we don't act now with a preemptive strike, an actual attack on Stark Tower, from the spies or elsewhere, could prove far more deadly." Romanoff added and Banner just sighed through his nose. Loki could tell he felt quite outnumbered, but that didn't matter right now.
"Oh yeah, with friends like us who needs enemies?" Banner snickered to himself. Loki got it, really, but at the same time Banner needed to see that if this was the worst that they think they will face, they are wrong.

"Banner, what will happen tomorrow will be a love tap compared to what we truly face. If you truly fear loss of life, then understand how necessary this to prevent exactly that." Loki's green magic flared out in spirals on the floor not unlike tree roots.

Banner remained silent.

"Are you in, or out Pretty Boy?" Romanoff clipped and Sesshomaru cut his gaze to Loki.

"No pressure my friend, we were going to inform you whether we wanted to include you or not. It would not have suited the tactic if you flew off the handle at my wounding." Loki didn't want to imagine the wrath Sesshomaru would unleash upon the mortal city of New York if he was left out of the plan. Loki noticed Sesshomaru brewed deep in thought, his eyes unfocused out the window.

He also knew, first hand and second hand, Sesshomaru had weathered far worse attacks. It simply depended if the Demon Lord thought the scheme worth his spilt blood or not.

"This Sesshomaru accepts. I shall inform Jaken and Rin tomorrow. Jaken will be entrusted with Bakusaiga, Tenseiga, and Rin." Sesshomaru turned to Loki, suddenly serious like Loki had seen him explaining his failed invasion.

Which already felt so long ago to Loki.

"Again, Loki, are you sure we shouldn't tell Thor? Natasha what about Clint?" Banner eased into the conversation and Loki scoffed and laughed darkly.

"If there is a singular person we shouldn't inform it would be Thor. He cannot lie, and may let slip the operation. That aside, I believe he loves the idea of one large happy family than he does me as myself. I'd be particularly shocked if he sees me wounded as something to raise Mjolnir over if Odin's murder attempt of me Asgard is any indication." Loki flicked his wrist dismissively and Romanoff rolled her thick lashed blue eyes.

This time Sesshomaru leaned back, as if in disbelief at Loki's words. Yet, it was true. Why would Thor see what would transpire as any different?

"Agreed. Ideally, I'd include Clint, but Fury would disagree including anyone else, including him. Also, I owe it to Clint to protect him. If this goes awry, Clint could shoulder more responsibility than necessary. Also, strategically speaking, the more genuine reactions that the public sees from us, the better. The primary objectives remain getting public tolerance of Glow Stick, sympathy for Pretty Boy, and heading off a real attack on Tony and his tower. Whatever fallout that will come Steve and the others will be handled post-Op." Romanoff pointed in the air as if checking items off a list.

"So, this is what it feels like to be a SHIELD operative. I can feel that warm and fuzzy feeling just take over." Banner winced, scratching his head, small smile pasted on his face.

"As your Star Wars film would suggest, welcome to the Dark Side." Loki bowed with a flourish, Cheshire smile on full display and his green magic deepened. Sesshomaru, Romanoff, and Banner, each in their own way, despite Banner's protests, understood that to prevent unspeakable horrors, one had to be horrifying first.

"This isn't going to be pretty. Tony is going to lose his marbles, and if you think I rage out, just
"They're adults Bruce, and we are about to be at war. We signed up for the Avengers initiative to protect the world against potential threats. They should understand that this goes beyond them being informed at every step. Their egos, even Tony's, should weather this." Romanoff insisted, tone lowering.

"You're right, but doesn't mean I have to like it, or that they will see it that way." Banner replied and Loki laughed again, this time with more heart.

"Good. It's settled. I'll inform Fury at oh four thirty. Bruce, we will need three cartridges for Cerberus and three for Blitzen for the M24. Two rifles will be set up at the opposite building, 10th floor, in a vacant office. They will be hooked up to a remote-control relay that I will control. Give the signal we practiced on after Pretty Boy's first question. I'll alternate targets starting with you Glow Stick to feign two shooters. I'll aim for all non-lethal chest points. Once you give the signal don't move." Nat mostly directed at Loki, but ended looking Sesshomaru directly in the eyes.

"Naturally." Loki assured and Sesshomaru inclined his head.

Having Clint smile at him it was sweet while it lasted. He played with fire. Truly. But he couldn't help himself. His selfishness definitely bit him back and Loki didn't think ice cream would help this time around.

"They planned the whole thing Tony. Fury, Loki, Nat, Fancy Pants, even Bruce. They set up the rifles, they made fools of us all." Clint could have spat nails at him and it would have had the same effect. His dark eyes never left Loki's. Thor grabbed Loki's shoulder with his broad hand, blue eyes crushed.

"Is this true, brother?!" Thor's voice thin in disbelief. It was Romanoff who answered.

"Glow Stick, we are really going to have to work on your definition of 'post-Op'. Yes Thor. It was a solid, and necessary measure. The public would have attempted to take out Loki eventually. A bloodless apology means nothing to a mass of scorned people. Trust me on this, I'm Russian." Romanoff shot a look to Clint and he ignored her. Thor backed away from Loki, and the first patter of rain hit the panes of glass as he went on Clint's side.

Loki took his place next to Romanoff. Loki saw this coming, to an extent. It always was to be this way, he on one side, his brother on another. His brother out in front, he in the back. Never side by side.

Clint regarded him as one would an animal they wanted to slay. Loki wished his gut didn't twist the way it did. He wished he didn't feel so...defeated. Like he was so wrong.

"...and you just didn't tell us?! I expect this shit from SHIELD, Loki and well I guess now Sailor Moon, but you Bruce?! You thought that this was a good idea?!" Stark's face flushed blood red in barely restrained anger. Sesshomaru finally managed to extract a bent, two-inch round cartridge from his chest, looking at it like someone who found a pebble in their boot.

"I told you all from day one that Fury, everyone, wanted to see Loki suffer. By targeting Sesshomaru as well, we tried to get people to see an attack on Loki is also an attack on Sesshomaru, and no offense, demonize the attackers. We were trying to head off a real attack Tony. It also gave us opportunity to test Cerberus and Blitzen." Banner rubbed his temple in an attempt to
stay calm. Stark charged over to Thor and took the shells out of his hand, eyes lighting up in recognition.

"You! You stole these?!” Stark shouted, Lady Potts eyes went wide at Banner.

"I actually made those. There as much mine as they are yours. I didn't steal anything." Banner retorted, leaning back offended. Stark took a couple paces, as if debating to physically assault Banner. Loki hoped he wouldn't. Sesshomaru had no spare youki if Banner lost his composure here.

"Gotta love semantics. You're banned from the lab. Consider your invitation revoked, for good. For life." Stark growled out and threw the shells on the floor for effect.

"Good to see you're acting level headed about this." Banner sighed, throwing his hands up in defeat.

"Level headed? You want to see leve-" Stark got cut off by Thor who gripped Mjolnir tight.

"I do not like your schemes brother!” Thor unleashed a rainstorm, it now battered against the windows.

"Then you dislike me. This is what I do Thor; this is who I am. I do what is necessary when advantageous to do so. I will not apologize for it, as I am through apologizing for who I am. You like the idea of a younger brother, but do you actually like me?” Loki clenched his fists.

"You've betrayed us right before an invasion is supposed to start. Some strategy." Rogers' voice cut like a machete through the tension. Fury turned to him, apparently waiting to see how this all played out.

"Betrayed? How exactly did we do that Captain? We did what we had to, like we always to keep people safe. I could wax poetic all day about how Loki wasn't behind the attack but it wouldn't work. Violence, Captain regrettably is the answer. We kept you all in the dark for plausible deniability. To protect you.” Fury answered, voice commanding to reach Rogers.

"Protection?! We don't need to be protected by you! We need to work together, be on the same side! We can't function this way as a team.” Rogers fired back and Loki just laughed, Sesshomaru's eyes meeting his, knowing what Loki was about to say.

"Just what does a strategist do Rogers? They minimize casualties, and devise tactics to protect their forces. You may not like it, but that is exactly why we are here. To protect you from unforeseen attacks and be one step ahead of the enemy. We headed off the eventual attack with our own with the outcome to satisfy Midgard's blood lust for me, and inspire so called 'humanization' for a Demon Lord.” Loki's voice sounded like dark silk. Rogers and everyone turned to him, eyes glaring at him and Romanoff stepped forward.

"What he said. We operate from the shadows so you don't have to. Stark, what if an attack on Loki happened and Miss Potts or Colonel Rhodes were collateral damage? Or worse, what if something did go awry with the Op and there were casualties? How would you feel that you allowed the attack to happen? How would you deal with those consequences if it got out it was a planned Op?” Fury's booming heated voice speared into a fuming Rogers and a brooding Thor.

"Thor, would you rather have us waste resources trying to prevent an attack on your brother and be ill prepared for the battles to come? Steve, you both better than anyone we need the world's military, not just SHIELD, on our side. Clint...you know why we had to do this. You know our
role; you know why we had to do this." Romanoff's steel voice cut slightly soft regarding Clint who simply crossed his arms.

"Yeah, of course. Who can trust me with anything right?" Clint snickered darkly and Loki's gut sank. No matter what Loki did; he hurt him.

"Actually, Tony, I'm gonna have to say I see their point here. It worked. Not last week I wanted to put two center mass in Loki, and well now let's say I'm pretty satisfied. And well mean I don't know Mr Silver badass, but on stage you could tell they were close." Colonel Rhodes said. Loki wanted to laugh, so that mortal Rhodes saw the merit in their tactic?

"Rhodey. You…you… don't get it do you?" Tony turned on his friend and Loki finally began to feel the lingering sting of Cerberus nullify in his blood stream.

"Get what Tony? You've kept me and others in the dark plenty of times, so explain to me how the shoe feels being on the other foot." Rhodes argued back and Stark set his jaw.

Before Stark could respond, Rogers spoke up.

"Who gave you the authority to decide we needed to be protected?! You can't just act on your own! I am the leader of the Avengers and you two-", looking at Romanoff and Banner, "-acted rogue. This can't happen with the Avengers." Rogers replied, still in disbelief that the original point wasn't addressed.

"I knew this would happen…" Banner muttered.

"Excuse me? Acted rogue? Who do you think founded the Avengers' initiative Captain?" Fury turned to Rogers, looking for a challenge. Oh. This would be interesting.

"How do you expect me to do my job when you have your own agenda? You made fools of us at an important showing." Rogers strode towards Fury and Agent Hill and Agent Coulson crossed the room to get between him and Rogers.

"Steve. You have a point, but you're no fool and no one will see you that way. They see you as Captain America who shielded Tony Stark from a terrorist attack. They see you as a hero." Agent Coulson reasoned. Loki gagged. Ugh, he did truly love the Captain didn't he? Rogers paused but his muscles remained flexed in frustration.

"You know what. I'm done. You all are kicked out of the tower. Get out of my house." Stark suddenly bit out and everyone turned to him. Fabulous. And to think people thought he overreacted. Sesshomaru gaze landed on Stark's neutrally.

"Seriously? Aren't we in the middle of something Tony?" Banner leaned forward, voice edgy.

"Do I look like I'm joking, doing stand-up? Yes, seriously. You guys got like ten minutes before I have Jarvis classify you all as hostile. Jarvis, declassify Natasha, Bruce, Fury, Horns, and Moonie as friendlies." Stark's voice honed sharp like a spear only aimed at one person, who currently had tangled silver hair.

"Done sir, though I do advise tha—" the AI system chattered but was cut off.

"Can it Jarvis, not in the mood." Stark, usually, didn't chastise his AI so strongly.

"Rin gather your things." It was the first thing Sesshomaru said during the whole exchange. Loki's face twisted as Rin nodded and ran by everyone. Loki didn't understand any of this.
'How could these mortals be this offended over looking foolish? Are they that unable to see the
larger picture and get over their own sense of pride? That this tactic was exactly what was needed?!
I never thought Banner would be so correct.' Loki, baffled, knew he didn't have enough magic
collected for a teleport but he knew of a nice Midgardian hotel nearby, a suite, whirlpool bath, pool
for Rin….

"Is that it? Is that all you have to say?" Stark crossed his arms as Sesshomaru rose, one of the
bullet holes still bleeding. Sesshomaru turned to him, wincing slightly as he carefully extracted the
second slug from his chest and held it in his hand. He held the two bent cartridges out to Stark.

Pause.

"The two projectiles that stayed in my chest proved more highly effective than the one that passed
through me. The poison, Blitzen is indeed potent; your work is a success." Sesshomaru stated with
no hint of emotion. Stark looked like he wanted to strangle him. Banner chuckled.

Loki suppressed a smirk, Sho was actually oblivious. It was glaringly obvious to Loki that Stark
was shaken by the fear of losing Sho. However, the way Stark treated him he night before threw
the straightforward Demon off. Maybe Stark thought that just because his friend didn't express his
emotions meant he didn't have them.

"Not. That." Stark clipped out and Sesshomaru's ears pricked up as he turned to Lady Potts.

"...Lady Potts, this Sesshomaru owes you for the garment that you acquired. Will this will be
sufficient compensation?" Jaken handed Sesshomaru a stack of Midgardian currency, he then
walked calmly and without hesitation put the money in her hand.

'Sesshomaru, you have a one-track mind.' Loki put a hand to his forehead.

"You...you think I care about the suit?! You think I'm that materialistic? You think that's what
Tony, and we are all upset about?" Pepper's voice cracked, sounding abnormally soprano.
Sesshomaru's ears lowered. Loki turned to Lady Potts, expression puzzled.

'Ah...yes I underestimated how much the mortals had harkened to Sho. They are most likely upset
that they thought he was critically wounded.' Loki shifted his gaze to Romanoff who returned his
exasperated expression.

"OK so Fancy Pants is suddenly loaded." Clint's comment went ignored. Sesshomaru sighed
through his nose.

"I was in your debt, I wished to repay it. The tactic was a success by my account, and I fulfilled my
position perfectly. By your reaction, you must disagree." He responded with the barest hint of
anger.

"That has nothing to do with it! I can't believe you, either of you. Do you know how worried, how
concerned we all were for you both?!" Lady Potts threw the money on the floor, they fluttered over
the spent shells Stark threw earlier.

Sesshomaru blinked and placidly turned to Loki, both of their eyes slightly wide. Loki scanned the
side of the room that currently glared him down.

'By the Nines...were all of these confused mortals genuinely concerned for my well-being? Is that
why they are so highly emotional? When had this happened? What clues did I miss?' Loki,
suddenly, was very caught off guard. Did Stark, Rogers, Lady Potts care about him?
He thought he had done a good job being distant from them. The Norns. What had Loki gotten himself into?

"Short sighted humans! Lord Sesshomaru has succumb to far worse injuries than this! He once, by himself, fought off an entire human army right after becoming critically wounded and losing his left arm! And do you think my Lord would befriend with a weakling who couldn't withstand such a predictable and feeble attack?" Jaken leapt to his feet, scuttling to collect the money off the ground.

"You lost an arm? How?!" Loki exploded, shocked out of his discovery. Sesshomaru glared down at Jaken then back up to Loki neutrally.

"My half-brother cut it off with Tessaiga. This Sesshomaru miscalculated and was not thinking clearly." Sesshomaru elaborated as Rin trotted in with a large bag and her bone.

'Ah, he must have transformed into his true form. The only way someone could have gotten the better of him. I still can't fathom why his father left that half-wit with Tessaiga and hid Sounga from him.' Loki reasoned, still vying to get Clint's attention who now ignored him. Clint would never forgive him for this.

"And you guys thought you two had problems." Banner pointed to both Thor and Loki. Loki rolled his green eyes and Thor reddened. Humor, at a time like this? Really?

"Can we get back on topic?! This isn't about how tough you guys are! You're both on our team now. We care about you two and you all manipulated that." Lady Potts spoke up again and Sesshomaru's ears shot up. Loki's jaw dropped.

Were these mortals using their wounded pride as a cover? Was their true offense their feelings were manipulated not their pride?

"Polly was right Lord Sesshomaru!" Sesshomaru looked down to Rin, still holding her bag, smiling brightly.

"So, that is what this is about. Dann, the dinner was no joke, you guys have gone and played house and I mean seriously played house. I heard that the Captain even wore an apron." Rhodes shook his head and crossed his arms. Rogers' face flushed red.

"Manipulation? In order for that to take place I would to not only have known of your sentiments towards me, but you would have had to tru...Norns! You lot trust me?!" Loki couldn't help it, he put a hand to his forehead, chuckling.

"Brother, of course we trust you!" Thor stepped forward. "You have spoken the truth of this invasion at every juncture." Thor observed and, well Loki straightened. Not really true, but he wasn't going to point that out to Thor.

There were secrets about the invasion that he was going to keep to himself, if at all possible.

"Norns, Thor, three years ago, I dismantled your team, crashed SHIELD's helicarrier, and killed hundreds of mortals. I do not expect such a grudge to not be held, even if it wasn't my expressed desire. I did not expect you all hold your breath about my injuries when that is all you sought weeks ago! Surely you recall Romanoff shooting Sho in the desert of New Mexico." Loki's weak magic wove around his fingers as he took a step back, looking at the room. Sesshomaru merely tilted his head slightly to the side at Loki.

He then remembered the conversation he had a while back with Rogers on the rooftop when Stark had dressed up as Sesshomaru.
'He had been the first of the 'Lost Creatures' to literally stand beside me. Lady Potts while did barter with Sesshomaru to throw me from a window, she had actually purchased me the lime tart the night of the dinner. And Stark, while insufferable, allowed me access to his lab.' These mortals not only trust me, but…

"Still not apologizing for it." Romanoff smirked slightly and Loki snorted in good humor. "Everyone needs to give Pretty Boy a break. His parents literally named him 'Killing Perfection' and his entire family tried to kill him, and his brother chopped off his arm. I think he may have some issues with positive emotional identification." Romanoff came to Sesshomaru's defense and Banner stood up.

"Can any of you even really blame Loki either? The guy is about open to friendship as Tony is to cheap coffee. Though, you and Natasha should never work together without telling everyone, again, ever. You two have gotten too close." Banner groaned, as if wishing he could go take a nap. Romanoff and Loki turned to each other and on cue draw stringed their mouths at him.

Wait. Did he just affirm that statement? He and Romanoff, close?

Pause.

"That answer you gave to the reporter. That you don't expect to be forgiven or trusted, you weren't just speaking to the press when you said that were you? You meant us, too, didn't you?" Rogers turned to Loki and his mouth went dry. He didn't know. Maybe? He was the God of Lies, it was far less complicated for them to trust his anger towards the Mad Titan and not who he was.

"Norns, you mortals don't listen! I do not seek forgiveness because I do not apologize. I do not seek to gain your trust because I do not…" Loki trailed off. He did seek out their trust though.

He wanted Clint's, but he had betrayed that. He had already sought out Romanoff's. He trusted her shooting him in the chest, not divulging anything about his Jotun heritage, appearance, and his desire of the Tesseract.

Why did he do those things? Why did he seek out trust that was so unnecessary? Why did he want it?

"Loki didn't seek our trust because it wasn't necessary and didn't think it would happen anyway. Loki doesn't waste his time with unnecessary efforts, unless it's something he really wants. I can relate." Romanoff finished for him. Clint turned to her and his face lit up and Loki finally locked eyes with him.

Clint's defined eyebrows rose up in an epiphany. An epiphany to what Loki had no idea.

"Trust is a currency we do not barter easily in." Sesshomaru lifted his chin and Stark caught his gaze. "This Sesshomaru will endeavor to report potential serious injury to his person in the future." Sesshomaru stood tall and straight, as if to say he had enough of the whole charade. His wound now finally stopped bleeding, but remained a ragged hole. Loki figured his exit wound probably looked far worse.

"And I don't intend on becoming, yet again, anyone's practice target." Loki added, cutting his gaze over to Clint who met his gaze. A lot less fiery anger danced in his eyes.

Pause.

"Good, now that this little heart to heart is settled, I am going with to Hill and Coulson and debrief the council. Romanoff, Barton remain here and report any suspicious activity. This has already
become a media supercell." Fury straightened his tie and Stark turned.

"No, like I said you guys now have six minutes before Jarvis classifies you five as hostiles. I am not being made an ass of in my own tower. Clint can stay." Stark resolutely crossed his arms in front of his chest. Romanoff, and in particular Banner looked taken aback.

"Stark, you need to look at the bigger picture." Fury stated, voice like a whip. Stark didn't respond and instead just tapped his overpriced Midgardian timepiece.

"Fine." Stark clearly needed time to cool down his infernal attitude. "I know of a particularly splendid hotel, Sesshomaru. Their presidential suite has a luxurious two-person jacuzzi and a rather spacious bedroom. Oh, and of course an indoor swimming area for Rin and Jaken." Loki winked. He said it just to irk Stark, since Sho obviously had no idea what a jacuzzi was. He also knew Water Demons, even ones as irritating as Jaken, enjoyed fresh water.

Both Stark and curiously enough Clint shot him fiery glares.

Sesshomaru nodded. He began to button up his ruined shirt, his precious sunglasses broken and forgotten.

"Oh no. There is no way we are allowing you unsupervised especially since we can't seem to track your magic signature. I allowed you to stay here under the supervision of my agents and the Avengers but if you aren't staying here you're going to come back with us to headquarters." Fury commanded, leaving no room for negotiation. Loki eyed him curiously, maybe the veteran spy was the mole after all. Out of the corner of his green eyes, he saw Sesshomaru's sword, Bakusaiga rattle and glow in Jaken's hands.

"You will imprison my brother?!!" Thor was to his feet as thunder clapped. Rogers turned to Fury in disbelief. The Nines Thor! Pick a better time to white knight.

"Oh, so you'd like me in a hotel I can check in into, but I cannot leave. At least until you need my services, yes?" Loki's face split into a smile that was all teeth. Clint's eyes stung Fury, wide like he wanted to protest.

Bakusaiga shot towards Sesshomaru, leaving a green trail of light to Sesshomaru's left hand. Sesshomaru's gaze fixated on Fury as he pointed Bakusaiga out towards him.

"You dare go back on our agreement, human?" Sesshomaru's voice sounded sharp and dark like tinted glass. Bakusaiga's green youki fingered out. Immediately Coulson and Hill had their guns out, pointed to Sesshomaru. This just got interesting.

"Drop the weapon, Demon." Hill ordered and Loki scoffed audibly.

Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed to slits and Loki wished he had enough magic to properly deal with the situation. He couldn't even summon his daggers yet.

"Coulson, Hill, keep your cool. The last time someone tried to make him do anything he destroyed a 22 million dollar fighter jet with a whip." Fury advised but Hill and Coulson didn't flinch. "You can put Tron away. He will be a guest, not prisoner. I don't go back on my word." Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed, Bakusaiga not powering down. Forget interesting, this could get dire, and quickly. Could Fury truly be the double agent vying to get them both together in SHIELD headquarters?

'If Fury is not the double agent then he cannot be serious. This must be some sort of ploy to keep us here together in Stark's Tower. He would not risk something like this. He is either calling Stark's bluff, or he is the mole.' Loki weighed the different options in his head, fighting a growing
anxiousness. He knew he had no way of telling which, even as the God of Lies.

Fury was telling the truth. It was either Stark's tower or nothing. Loki did not like the sound of any of this, they were essentially cornered. He noticed Romanoff shift her weight, probably realizing the same thing.

"Jaken, take Rin to the safe place we discussed. Remain until I retrieve you." Sesshomaru spoke slowly. Bakusaiga crackled with green jolts and Loki's pulse picked up tempo.

"Yes, Lord Sesshomaru! Come Rin, these humans are so fickle! First this blacksmith makes our Lord stay to defend his tower, then he orders him to leave it after he defended it! Humans are unreliable and ungrateful. I hope our Lord shows them no mercy." Jaken waved his dowsing rod staff. It had taken until Jaken used it for him to remember it. It was Inu no Taisho's and had a peculiar ability of picking up spiritual elements. Rin bit her lip to Stark, head tilted to the side.

It sincerely bothered Loki to see Rin upset. She was a sunray of a little mortal girl but seeing Stark treat her Lord so, dimmed her spirit.

"Rin, you, and Toady can stay." Stark relented, and Rin vehemently shook her head.

"No Stark. I will always be with my Lord Sesshomaru and Jaken. And Jaken is not a toad, he is a Water Demon, and he is right about you." Rin admonished. Nicely said Rin. She continued to walk to the elevator and Lady Potts shot a simmering gaze to Stark.

"Tony, I understand you're upset but let's talk this out. We can't allow them to be on their own." Rogers pointed to Rin and Jaken. Perhaps the Captain was coming around. He had been silent for a bit.

"Jaken is Mr. Moneybags, and Rin grew up in the warring states era of Japan; they'll be fine." Stark avoided Lady Pott's wide-eyed stare.

"Loki, if you come with us, we can avoid all of this. We will not harm you if you come peacefully." Agent Hill announced.

Loki snorted.

"I'm not going to sit here and let you just cage Loki, again." Banner stood striding next to Loki, facing Fury. "That was your plan this whole time, right Fury? Get all your monsters in house? Figure out how Sesshomaru helped me control my transformation? Tinker with Loki's brain to understand the full effects of mind control and magic? Coerce his Demon Lord friend into being a Guinea Pig too? You banked on this whole thing." Banner finished and Loki frowned. He didn't need Banner's championing of him. If anything, it was accelerate splashed on a fire.

"Is this what you really want Tony? You're willing to throw away all our work, sabotage our operation to prevent a global invasion because your ego got bruised?" Romanoff put her hands on her hips, eyes glinted like steel.

"Five minutes." Stark stood resolute. He really could be as stubborn as Sesshomaru.

The elevator dinged, Rin and Jaken got on. Right as the elevator doors closed Bakusaiga's energy ramped up, coils and flames of green igniting from the Bakusaiga's blade. Loki pulse raced in his temples. His magic still in no way recovered to stop Sesshomaru and Bakusaiga now.

"I'm going after them. Jarvis call the elevator back up." Lady Potts ordered, striding purposefully past Stark, face blank.
"Sesshomaru, it's quite alright, I can go with them." Loki held his hands up and Sesshomaru's cold eyes sliced over to him, looking feral and resolute.

"Never. Again." Sesshomaru's voice stopped his heart, his razorblade eyes returned to Fury. Loki as well as everyone in the room knew exactly what Sesshomaru meant.

"Loki take Tenseiga." Loki balked, Sesshomaru needed Tenseiga for protection, not him. "You, Tenseiga, and Banner retreat and await my instruction. This Sesshomaru will handle this situation." Sesshomaru lowly growled out. Loki, again, knew Sho became protective when cornered, but Sho had never ordered him about and he was not about to allow it now.

"If you think you can command me, or that I will leave you to SHIELD at a time like this you are mad." Loki stopped talking as Sesshomaru whipped his red eyes toward him. They were black at the edges and his pupils stood out as hard shards of teal. His markings started to morph.

"I outrank you. Do as I command." Sesshomaru barked harshly. Oh, he did not just bring up that archaic nonsense about rank! Sho must be mad to think Loki would simply smile and bow to that rubbish. Even if he was no longer a Prince of Asgard.

"Sho, you know I don't take orders, not even from you." Loki chose his words carefully. Bakusaiga's youki was feeding his Demonic instinct to transform. He had only seen Sho's true form once, and it was, coincidentally, in a similar situation, only against Odin.

It wasn't a pleasant experience.

"Uh, everyone..." Banner stammered as laser sights pinged from the nearby building through the windows, lighting up Sesshomaru's chest and moon, along with Loki, and Banner, who now looked positively green, and not just from the glow of Bakusaiga.

'Sesshomaru is surely no fool, clearly he knows what those laser sights mean, and my magic is low to be of much use defensively. If he can stall, I may be able to summon enough magic to teleport Sho..." Loki, frustrated, tried in vain to gather more magic. He fought a surging adrenaline in his system that trembled his fingers and drained the color from his cheeks.

"Jarvis, put up full privacy mode on the tower." Stark demanded. Loki let loose a breath of relief. Yes, the situation would be easier to de-escalate now.

"Sir, I am afraid I cannot access certain aspects of my security protocol, including the privacy mode." Stark's eyes widened and he turned to Fury who revealed nothing. Loki fidgeted and wrung his hands, chest constricting.

"You aren't the only one who can light things up, Demon." Agent Hill's voice sounded heavy like uru stone. Loki gritted his teeth, so they set up a defensive perimeter around the Tower. Did Hill, Coulson, or Fury call it in? Two of the three mortals?

"Real Power and Mr Nirvana, it looks like our pissing contest has come to a draw. Both of you don't want to be practice targets, and I have a tight schedule. So, Loki, if you volunteered...Thor maybe give us a hand with your brother's dance partner?" Fury began and Bakusaiga surged again, blade singing. Thor shifted. Loki's spine stiffened like an ice pick struck it. If Thor took up any arms against Sho all Svartalfheim would cut loose.

"Thor, stay put!" Loki bellowed, voice cracking, lungs crinkling in anxiety.

"Fury stop this! It's clear you can trust Loki by now!" Clint shouted, voice hoarse. Loki's heart skipped in panic, Clint should be rallying for his capture, not his freedom.
"Tenseiga to Loki and Banner." Sesshomaru ordered, eyes still blood red, and Tenseiga soared out of his sheath and flipped blade down, impaling himself into the floor. Tenseiga summoned a blue glowing force field around the both of them. The laser sights now safely refracted off the blue youki from Tenseiga. Loki heard Tenseiga screaming. He could almost make out what Tenseiga was saying.

'Sesshomaru is now without protection. I can conceive of no way he can withstand not transforming if any of their shots hit their mark.' Loki frowned, throwing out his left hand to Thor, hand glowing a faint green in a weak attempt at intimidation. In response, a rattling thunderbolt raged across the sky. It most certainly didn't help the oppressive, charged tension in the air.

He needed to contain the situation, but he was running out of options.

"Tony, you can stop all of this right now if you just let them stay." Rogers turned to Stark and Stark just frowned and sets jaw. Everyone in the room, including Romanoff, stood too tense to move. Banner was barely holding it together. With the room sticky with frayed nerves, Loki swallowed audibly. How exactly could he get either Fury, Sho, or Stark to back down without his magic? It was an obnoxious power struggle to be sure.

"Stark's sovereignty of his Tower will be respected. Loki go with Tenseiga and Banner. Now." Sesshomaru barked to Rogers and Loki both, fangs bared. So, he didn't want Fury to force Stark's hand.

"Stubborn Dog, I will do no such thing." Loki took a step forward and was immediately greeted by a shot from Agent Coulson's pistol. It ricocheted off of Tenseiga's force field and into the wall between Rhodes and Clint.

Loki grappled with the consequences of killing Agent Coulson swiftly with a good crunch to his neck. Though he replaced the intricate protective spell on Clint, it wasn't an infallible defense.

"Shit Coulson! It's a magic sword, you're going to hit us!" Rhodes exclaimed and Clint stilled. Loki pivoted to become fully between Agent Coulson and Clint.

"Captain America and the rest may have trusted you, but I know you're a snake, and I won't allow you to backstab anyone else." Coulson spoke impassively and something in Loki ran a shaking hand through his matted hair at the past tense. "You, and your rabid guard dog." Agent Coulson stated pointedly to Loki, gun smoking and Stark whipped around to him and sneered. Seems that Stark gets easily offended by someone demeaning Sho. Good.

Coulson saw them both as monsters. Clint thought him one, the rest of these mortals did now as well.

Yet, he couldn't allow Sho to transform and give the rest of the mortals, and maybe even Thor to think of him as one as well. They all still needed to trust him, and his true form was fearsome to say the least.

But how could he stop this?!

"Coulson he won't. In Loki's own way, he is trying to help us." Clint's voice seemed closer to Loki as Bakusaiga's youki surged out, twisting and coiling, shattering three windows. The green youki snapped out at Coulson's gun, vaporizing the barrel causing him to drop it. Another flare of youki snapped down Fury's feet but he didn't jump at the warning shot.

"You're defending him, Barton? You did quite the contrary when you last underwent your tests."
Coulson suggested and Loki's eyes flashed a vicious gleam of green. Tests?

"Leave Clint be, you dim, whining mortal." Loki warned, his nerves working themselves into a frenzy. Cerberus still blocked his magic, like a dam on river. There but just out of reach. He could not access enough to neutralize Bakusaiga, but enough for one spell…

A shrrraaaaack was heard and then a deafening pop. In a flick of a wrist Bakusaiga cut the sniper rifle bullet from the air just in the nick of time right as Rogers flung out his circular shield to protect Sho from Agent Hill's shot. Romanoff drew her baton squared up at Agent Hill.

"Stand down! Coulson, Hill, Romanoff, everyone, stand down!" Fury bellowed the order, but Loki wasn't sure if the snipers would actually obey. Loki's pulse pounded in his ears like a wardrum. The hint of strained emotion in Fury's voice almost fully convinced Loki he was merely calling Stark's bluff.

"If you, Mr. Nirvana, come with me in Real Power's place, I'll allow him his freedom. Provided that you comply with some security protocols and strategic questions we have for you. And Barton, you can come with us as well." Fury negotiated and Loki's blood ignited. Black magic flooded the whites of his eyes. He had one ace in the hole left to play. He had to put an end to this, he had to.

"… really Fury? You're using their loyalty against each other like this? I won't…" Banner's voice churned followed by the sound of ripping fabric.

No. He wouldn't allow this. Stark was right. He brought Sho here; he was his responsibility. And he would prohibit Fury subjecting Clint to more useless tests. Clint was innocent, he would no longer pay the price for his mistakes.

"This Sesshomaru acce—" In no galaxy, time, nor realm would he allow Sesshomaru to finish that sentence. Loki dug deep and committed to his last resort spell.

What was that Midgardian turn of phrase? 'Desperate times call for desperate measures'?

"Director Fury, does your gall know no bounds?! Under no sun will I allow you them to walk into your dungeons. Lo and behold me! I'm the monster you seek to cage!" Loki's deep voice rippled through the room. Enough guessing games of the mole! Enough of this foolishness!

Coulson called him a snake and that accusation darted through his mind, zigzagging like a fly caught under a glass. Mortals did fear those creatures, didn't they? Which one would spark their fear most?

'Try to tame the Broken Blade, King of Monsters! I dare it!' Loki thought, or maybe he actually said it, it was hard to tell since he was beginning to shapeshift.

His bones shifted and cracked. Loki's blackened eyes inflated with a deep green pupil that rolled to life as his vision dimmed to black and white. His spine lengthened out long and ribs more than tripled and turned spindly and circular. His limbs shortened back into his spine as his skin hardened, darkened, and scaled over. His head lengthened, flattened and all his hair fanned wide and low around where his shoulders used to be. Finally, retractable fangs grew long, and potent with thin venom in an onyx, cave-like mouth.

Beside him a familiar, blood thinning roar echoed followed by a reverberating thud. A tongue darted out, tasting the air. Banner. Ally.

Loki uncoiled his massive, forty-eight-foot-long frame and reared back, his whole body covered in
sleek, black, varnished scales. His long, thick tail whipped to and fro to a rhythm only Loki heard. Loki squared up and unfurled his narrow hood. Depicted on the backside of his hood in emerald green scales lay the stylized geometric insignia of Yggdrasil.

Though shapeshifting, once practiced, required little magic, Loki didn't shapeshift into other animals often for three good reasons. Firstly, they were arduous to perfect and hard to come out of. The simpler the creature, the better. Also, it was often much more trouble than it was worth, almost seen as a novelty, or a trick, more than anything. However, the most important reason was his sentient mind was often overridden by the creature's own instincts and biological tendencies.

This time, his mind clouded with the tenacious, territorial, secretive, and agile instincts of the Midgardian black mamba.

Pronounced and predatory, round black eyes with sinister emerald pupils surveyed the lifeforms around him and his nest. He quickly flicked a forked tongue before opening his jaw revealing a cavernous, obsidian maw. Loki then let loose an aggressive, savage hiss that could shame any banshee.

Despite that his large serpentine form had no ears, Allspeak still operated, though muffled and muted as if the sounds were in black and white.


He smelled the humid air with a dart of his tongue and read the innumerous, confusing vibrations and quakes on the floor and through the air. Banner, the large egg to his left, his vibrations rang strong and deep. Another egg directly behind him, rocked nimble and sure, Clint. To his right, a steadfast yet bloodthirsty egg to his right emitted a threatening, but not hostile, quivering, Sho.

There were other, disharmonious, clamoring reverberations that rattled his mind and almost deafened him. There were far too many lifeforms about!

The agitated serpent swerved, slithered, and lunged his steel smooth scales across the slick floor. He reared up even higher this time, his flat black head almost grazing the ceiling, and his retracted fangs sprung forward and seeped glistening, green venom.

Loki, suspended and flared, dominated his nest with a vicious thrash of his black tail. A blue, pulsing Tenseiga clattered unhappily across the floor. His hazardous, serpentine eyes locked down the three egg poachers as if he turned them to stone like the Midgardian figure of lore, Medusa.

If a snake could smirk, Loki did.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New year to all my wonderful commenters!!! Sorry this couldn't be a happier update, but at least no one is dead (yet?).

Thank you again for reading, and I hope you enjoyed our lovely scheming Loki, and the gooey bits with Clint. (frosthawk ftw). Please let me know what you think!

-TL
"Try to tame the Broken Blade, King of Monsters, I dare it!" Loki sneered as he began to shift and warp. It disturbed Clint, it caused his jaw to slack and his throat to itch. Loki’s body breaking and changing into a creature Clint couldn’t yet put a finger on didn't cause it, but the fact that Loki referred to himself as a monster deeply jarred him.

Loki still really believed it. That he was some monster. Snippets of conversation flashed back through his mind like arrows in the sky.

'I existed once, I truly did, you know that.' Loki murmured the night of the strategy meeting.

'I believe, Clint, that I may just be one of those ghosts of which you speak.' Loki whispered when he saw Loki in the kitchen after his nightmare.

'Do not mistake yourself to be anything near as disgraceful as I.' Loki hissed after their third spar when he laid him out.

He wasn't a wild animal, he wasn't broken, not even close. He knew wild animals, he used to work with them. He knew broken too.

"I'm an animal trainer, not tamer. Understand Bart?" Vildan corrected, a serious tone simmering under his knowing smile. Clint, at first, hated the nickname that everyone gave him but it was slowly growing on him.

It was if the nickname made him someone new. It was what he wanted after all. A year after Nate… yeah. He had to leave and send back money. He wasn’t good to anyone back home and probably vice versa. Though he was especially no good to his younger brother Jake. His late nights, his busted knuckles, bruised ribs and black eyes began to rub off on him.

And it wasn't like mom was around anymore to give half a shit about...well...anything.

Besides who needed school? He was always more street smart than book smart anyway.

"What's the difference? You make the animals do what you want." Clint stated matter of factly and Vildan just tutted the way he always did when he wanted to be a condescending jackass.

He let it go usually. He didn't think 'Vildan the Visionary Animal Trainer' meant to sound so high and mighty all the time.

"You can't force animals like these ones—" Vildan gestured to 'King Midas' the African lion, 'Krishna' and 'Arjuna' the Bengal tigers, two of the six elephants that Clint didn't know the names of, and lastly a big yellow snake, 'Medusa'. Clint didn't know where they got the names of the
Bengal tigers from but he knew 'Medusa' and that definitely suited that big snake. It wasn't that Clint was afraid of the snake, it was more like he flat out didn't like them. Snakes creeped him out a bit.

"—they're wild, and are better this way. I can encourage them to perform certain tasks, but I must first build a relationship with them. I see inside their mind, and them, mine. You must gain their trust, and always treat them courteously." Vildan lectured and Clint just scratched the underside of his jaw. Vildan could take things a little too seriously, and could be a little too philosophical at times.

Vildan and his girlfriend Wanda with her twin brother, Pietro fled Bosnia three years ago after the war broke out. Clint vaguely watched the news about it, it apparently was a real shitshow.

Pietro was an acrobat too, and a know-it-all, arrogant, smart-ass. He always seemed to pop out of nowhere and bug him about something. He also constantly acted like they were rivals, but they totally weren't. Sure, he was fast, had great balance from parkour but Clint was stronger, better at the trapeze and Pietro couldn't shoot worth snot. But, besides all his obnoxious antics Clint could say that Pietro at least took the animals seriously.

A lot of people thought that animals in circuses were mistreated and yeah maybe that was the case with some circuses but as far as Clint could tell, Vildan, and yes even that Euro-trash Pietro, treated the animals well. They always pet them, and even talked to them, even the snake. Clint didn't know why they had a snake, it couldn't really do many cool tricks, but apparently not many circuses had them.

"Yeah, sounds the same as pets. But we consider pets tame, what's the real difference here?" Clint challenged as Vildan reached caressed Krishna's...(or was that one Arjuna's?) back.

"To tame these animals, would mean a broken soul, or rather spirit. Their spirit would be broken. That is a tragedy, one for the circus, one for me, and of course for the animals." Vildan's low, straight ponytail whipped around a bit as he gave the tiger one last hearty scratch. Ok, he could really get deep about this stuff. "Let me now show you." Vildan rocked back and Clint just shook his head.

"Nah, thanks man but I'm good with just doing my thing." Clint laughed uneasily. He didn't want to insult Vildan with his animals, but he really wanted to keep all his fingers.

And he swore the snake was plotting something.

"You're new and young, Bart. You should be open to learn new things." Vildan tutted again with that old man smile. He actually ruffled his hair with his hand, after he touched the tiger. Maybe he had a tick now, lime disease was a real thing.

"Uh yeah, sure maybe. Maybe later or something." It wasn't that he didn't like Vildan, it was just the guy reminded him a little of Nate. He couldn't put his finger on why, they didn't look anything alike and Vildan had a pretty heavy accent. Maybe it was his smile, or the way he ruffled his hair. Maybe everyone and everything reminded of Nate, but not at the same time, or in the same way.

"Later? Maybe not all of us get one of those." Vildan stared right into Clint's eyes, his prominent nose hooking down. Clint didn't know Vildan's whole story, like most of the people in this circus. Not a lot of people knew his either, but...they all had one. The Bosnian War couldn't have a walk in the park for them, especially if they came all the way to Iowa.

Vildan then lifted his eyebrows in challenge, and that reminded him of when Nate did the same
thing when they snuck into a sold-out Metallica concert. Nate wasn't a huge animal guy, but he was always down for a challenge. He'd totally be calling Clint a pansy-ass right now.

"Fine. Bring it on." Clint huffed as if his time was being wasted to make up for the smug look on Vildan's face. Vildan went into the enclosure and brought out the python. Of course, the damned snake. He couldn't start with something that couldn't eat him. Like Dumbo or whatever the elephant's name was.

He was wearing the snake like a scarf or something. He couldn't be serious.

"This is my beautiful Esma. Her circus name is Medusa, ružan! Such an ugly name! My Esma is pretty, smart and mostly docile. She simply hates sudden movements and noises. She is not naturally mean." Vildan handed him the snake and Clint sucked it up only because he knew on the off chance there was some afterlife, Nate would never let him live it down if he bolted here. The only thing helping him was that the snake was yellow and white. It was almost like a cartoon.

Vildan sensed his hesitation and snickered a little, but to his credit, only a little.

"Confidence! Be confident around her. Snakes frighten easy when others are frightened. Slow and confident, like you're comforting a child." Vildan instructed and Clint rolled his eyes. Vildan slowly lifted the way too long python off his own shoulders and into Clint's arms like a blanket. Immediately the snake began to coil and Clint froze.

No. Man up. It's just a snake, it doesn't even have venom. If Vildan, the guy who once pissed into the wind, sober, could handle this snake without losing a limb, so could he.

"Oh. Cool. I guess." Clint began to lift the snake over his head and let 'the beautiful Esma' do her thing of…well…curling around him. It was pretty cool, the snake totally felt different than he thought it would. It felt smooth, alive and warm, not cold or slimy.

Vildan tutted.

"You guess… Pythons may not fetchsay paper or jump through loops of fire, but they are smart. They can learn. Be calm, sure, and slow with snakes. I will teach you more later, for now just now feel Esma." Vildan jutted his stubbly chin up and Clint, slowly, pet what he thought would be a safe part of the snake, halfway back.

"Hey Barty! Didn't know you could actually pick up a good-looking girl! Try to treat her right, she'll probably be the only girl who wants to be around you!" Pietro, wearing of course an Adidas tracksuit, called out from across the tent and sped off. Clint would have yelled at the bleach blond asshat and ran after him if he wasn't holding a snake that could squeeze him to death.

He couldn't even yell back, that would definitely scare the stupid snake and Pietro knew it.

"At least I don't look like I'm in a knock-off boy band…Why is your friend such a pain in my ass?" Clint muttered and Vildan laughed heartily.

"He wants to be your friend." Vildan smirked and Clint resisted the urge to kick him, again. Except he of course still had the snake. He knew this whole thing was some sort of trap, and he fell for it.

Oh, Nate is definitely laughing his ass off at him right now. Like he needed a friend like that!
Clint never really held 'the beautiful Esma' again, which now he sort-of regretted. Because, the man who he thought was dead less than a half hour ago, was now a giant snake.

A giant, black, venomous, panicked, angry snake. Super.

Today was easily in Clint's top three worst days of his life. Yesterday was a joke compared to today. He would easily have another yesterday instead of today.

He would have easily taken another day of alien invasions, getting cursed, Fury's accusations, finding out he was being used, Loki and his spar, Loki and his magic, Loki and his grins, Loki and his taunting kiss…over this.

When the first bullet hit Loki it was if someone took barbed wire and flossed it through his throat and stomach. From his angle, he could see his green eyes bulge out and his chest flinch. The small spray of blood, almost as if he had spritzed red cologne on himself, spiked Clint's pulse.

Nate. It was Nate all over again. A mix of Pietro and Nate was happening again and Clint's instincts took over. An urgency that hadn't lit up his mind in years overwhelmed his blood stream and before he knew it he caught Loki before he hit the stage.

He could have been in the line of fire, but he didn't care. He just couldn't be too late. Not again.

And… when Loki's mouth filled with blood his eyes glassed over and his whole body convulsed Clint couldn't fight back a strained, screamed, 'no'.

Not Loki too.

Everyone strong and sure in his life he personally watched deteriorate and implode in front of him. He was too late to stop Nate, his indomitable big brother. He was too clueless to help Pietro, the cock-sure, rival turned friend. But he wouldn't allow this to happen to Loki, the unbreakable, resilient, mysterious God. He'd save the only man who could flash a smile, and he'd return one just one on reflex.

He didn't know what really made him suddenly feel that way, but when he committed to something, he stuck with it. And he wasn't going to stop now. Not with Loki.

Yet, Loki and Nat played him, again. He thought he was saving him from the enemy, but no, he was saving him from himself. Plausible deniability. Out of scope. Just like when Loki pretended he was Fancy Pants and he had to go through hoops with Fury. He was always in the dark, but always put on the spot to hold everything together. Now, he had to figure out a way to hold the Avengers and Loki together.

Clint didn't know if anyone else had picked up on Loki's little tells: his hand wringing, finger twitching, eyes buzzing, that he was about to spiral into a tail-spin, but he did. Maybe he was the only one who cared enough to pay attention to what Loki was really feeling.

Loki was scared.

And, in perfectly a dramatic fashion he had come to expect from the handsome god, he panicked and turned himself into the scariest, most stereotypical villainous creature he could. Clint knew he could shapeshift into people, but he didn't really think he could do animals, especially ones as big around as an SUV's car tire and as long as almost three of them.

He reacted the same way most people would, just…in a way he didn't expect.
Clint didn't really blame Loki for it, but damn he picked a bad time to not think everything through. Loki, scared that he couldn't prevent his best friend for being his fall guy, freaked out and tried to scare everyone off. Clint guessed it was the only way his magic let him. Cerberus had obviously wreaked havoc on his magic, otherwise he would've probably teleported out long ago. Which would have been for the best.

Though, if he had to be nauseatingly honest with himself, he didn't want Loki to leave the tower. Who would watch Loki's six o'clock? Who would help him work through his outbursts? Clint knew Loki wasn't a kid but he definitely struggled with his self-destructive tendencies. However, anything was better than Loki, Fancy Pants, or Bruce, or any combination of the three in SHIELD H.Q.

He knew that Loki and Sesshomaru were close, but seeing their friendship tested like this, and seeing how Bruce reacted sort of relieved Clint in a way. Clint was just an ordinary guy in an extraordinary situation. He couldn't match all that supernatural stuff so knowing a Demon Lord had Loki's back, and gave a shit, relieved him. Nat and them had a point, he saw all the people screaming for Loki's blood, hating him, and god did it get under his skin.

The exact same thing happened to him, and sure, it basically tanked his career, but no one wanted his blood. Loki and Fancy Pants took one for the team alright.

Which is what everyone in the room was currently doing in one way or another. He didn't quite blame Tony either for blowing his stack.

Though, c'mon man, sometimes you just got to take one for the team and let this situation cool down. He thought Tony might just give in when he yelled an objection when Fancy Pants was about to turn himself in. Clint knew he cared about the guy.

Though Tony's attitude wasn't making anything easier, Clint's problem wasn't with Tony. It was surprise, surprise, Fury and SHIELD.

Hill and Coulson couldn't be any less helpful either. It was sheer luck that the bullet that ricocheted off of the magic forcefield didn't hit him or Rhodes, or that Steve was in the right place at the right time to deflect the bullet meant for Fancy Pants.

Because, Clint was fairly certain that Fancy Pants, just like Bruce and Loki, was on the brink of turning Fury, Hill, and Coulson to mush. And while they weren't his favorite people, he couldn't stand by and let them just get killed. He also knew that Loki wanted them alive, whatever he was doing now had to be stopped.

"Holy Hell." Steve said across the room. His sentiments exactly. How was he supposed to help Loki not get hit by anymore sniper bullets now? He was a terrifyingly large target.

And it wasn't like Bruce wasn't currently hulking out either. He really, really hoped his tutoring session with Fancy Pants paid off.

Clint's stomach flipped as Loki careened forward like a whip crack to rise up as a challenge to Fury, Hill, and Coulson. Damnit, Loki, couldn't you see this was a colossally bad idea?!

"Friends, this does not bode well. Loki has never had the best control over his mind when he creature-shifts." Thor informed and Clint rolled his eyes. Great, could this get any worse?! A prickling sensation trickled up Clint's spine. A foreboding, dark shadow settled over Clint.
Something in him was telling him something bad was just around the bend.

"Everyone. No sudden movements! Snakes can't handle the vibrations." Clint used his entire diaphragm to shout the command. He didn't know if anyone would listen to him or not but regardless he fluidly moved towards Loki. He had to get through to him, everything would just go to hell if he impaled Fury with what had to be foot-long fangs.

Please let this work.

"Technically, snakes can't handle anything you know, no hands?...what?" Clint ignored Tony's stupid quip. Clint swerved around Loki's slithering tail to get in front of him, between Coulson, the agent most likely to shoot him, and Loki. He slid his hands over Loki's back, in what he hoped would be a placating, calming gesture, not one that would get him skewered.

Loki's flat, scaled head swiveled around. His black and green eyes alight and mouth snapped closed. It reminded him, weirdly of how he was when he kissed him a second time on the roof. Only then he wasn't a giant cobra snake.

"Easy Loki, easy. Come back alright? You didn't have to do this. This isn't you." Clint slowly, though surely and confidently caressed Loki's black scales. Loki pulsed and twisted with energy, but what really shook Clint was that he was certain he could feel Loki's fluttering heartbeat a mile a minute.

Yet, Loki hadn't lunged yet. He hadn't attacked yet.

A small explosion of blood and scales erupted to his left. A sniper shot, blown wide of a sure target, struck Loki near the end of his tail and Loki let loose a scream like steam escaping a pressurized valve. Clint's heart pounded in ears, he had to calm himself down, and Loki. He couldn't protect Loki if he panicked, he had literally....wait.

That huge fucking idiot.

That was it. Loki was trying to get hit! He was pulling the whole 'eyes on me' thing to divert attention from the Hulk and Fancy Pants.

"All agents stand down." Fury commanded again. Before Clint could do much else, the Hulk, decided enough was enough, and roared which stilled everyone in the room.

He leapt out of the window, climbing up the tower. Well, that wasn't the worst thing that could have happened, Coulson could be Tony's new rug. Just where the Hulk was headed to Clint had no idea but he was not about to....oh.

"Elvis has left the building." Rhodes muttered. We've got two joksters here now, thanks for the one-liner Rhodes. Clint watched the Hulk sail through the air and onto the side of the building where the snipers were perched. He began to climb up it one decimated window at a time.

"Bruce! We need possible containment across from Stark Tower..." Nat called in, but even with her skills she couldn't get to Hulk before anything happened.

Many of the red laser sights has now disappeared, probably now pointing down to the Hulk.

"All tactical support fall back." Hill demanded, Clint thinly smiled to himself, if they were smart, they would. Then Clint squinted his eyes.
Right above where the Hulk launched himself a small parting in the clouds had appeared. It wasn't
daylight, like Thor had let up on the storm and sun had peaked through. The parting in the clouds
was dark, but small enough that he doubted anyone else saw it but him.

He was Hawkeye after all.

But he had spotted it, a smudge obscure, mottled smudge of space. It couldn't be a portal… could
it? Loki couldn't make portals like that, neither could Thanos. If he could, then the Other wouldn't
have bothered with getting Loki to get the Tesseract, right?

"The five entities, Lord Sesshomaru, Natasha Romanoff, Nick Fury, Bruce Banner, and Horns have
been classified as hostiles. Sir, would you like for me to proceed with appropriate countermeasures
or did you have something else in mind?" Jarvis sounded and Clint cursed. He had forgotten all
about Jarvis. Clint wasn't exactly sure what 'appropriate countermeasures' Jarvis had in mind, but
he knew it wasn't going to be a group hug.

"Stark, let's go with 'something else'." Fury tensely negotiated and Clint didn't have enough time to
look Tony's way, because on his right, Sesshomaru took a step forward.

"Um, still deciding, can you leave your opinion in the form of a voicemail? I just love those." Tony
responded and Clint resisted the urge to groan out loud.

"Enough." Sesshomaru's placid voice cut through the chaos. Clint noticed his markings were all
black and the death ray around his sword shockwaved out. Clint was actually impressed; Fancy
Pants had shown remarkable restraint until now.

Fancy Pants leapt towards Fury, but he wasn't moving nearly as fast as he had been earlier. The
poison he got hit by must have hit him hard too for him to move so sluggishly. Clint continued to
keep Loki's attention by caressing him, but it had begun to waiver.

"Easy Loki, don—" Clint got cut off.

"Stop, Son of Taisho!" Thor bellowed as Mjolnir soared through the air over Loki's back. Fancy
Pants almost dodged Mjolnir completely, but it struck him hard on the left shoulder, twisting him
around.

"If there is a battle you seek, then seek it with me." Thor stormed forward, blond hair streaming in
the wind. Didn't he just say that to not have any sudden movements? Thor strode all the way up to
Fancy Pants, which like little brother like big brother, seemed like another colossally bad idea.

"You will actually betray me, Storm God?" Sesshomaru snarled, eyes flashing white and red.
Mjolnir returned, streaking past a dodging Sesshomaru and into Thor's hand, who immediately
swung and Sesshomaru swiped his sword to meet Mjolnir.

The impact and high shriek of the sword and low gong of metal rippled through Clint's skull as a
terrible headache. Clint didn't have time to react as the two spun to face the other, lightning striking
green youki.

"I'd never betray you! I wish to avoid further bloodshed of my friends, including you!" Thor
shouted and beyond them, the dark, starry smudge in the sky grew.

They clashed again and a rogue sniper shot zipped through the air and skimmed Sesshomaru's ear
and miraculously only through Thor's hair. Blood sprayed the air from the ear wound.

Loki's smooth scales rushed beneath Clint's hands as Loki spun, flared and launched after Thor in a
"Loki! No!" Clint called out. This was chaos. Someone was going to end up dead.

"You two hot shots, both stop." Steve yelled, attempting to interject himself into the fight as Loki opened his mouth out wide, fangs extended.

Loki rocked forward like a tidal surge and caught Steve off guard with his speed. Steve paused in his advance, instead opting to throw his shield which sliced through the air between Thor and Sesshomaru. Ok Steve, that was not really going to help…

"Loki that's Thor!" Clint called out during Loki's strike but, it was too little too late. Loki clamped down partially on Thor's shoulder. To Clint, it looked like Loki tried to pull his attack at the last minute.

"Brother!" Thor cried in agony and Clint hadn't heard Thor cry out like that, ever. Loki balked back in surprise and writhed his massive frame across the floor. Loki knocked Steve back with his tail, sending him sailing across the room towards the shattered window.

Nat and Hill, supposedly putting their differences aside, jumped into action to prevent Steve from flying out the window with a quick grab. The rain outside came down in sheets.

A roar was heard across the street and Fury whipped around. Coulson used the distraction to line another shot. No. He wasn't going to let Coulson take another cheap shot at Loki.

Loki didn't mean for any of this to happen. Clint was just close enough to charge forward and tackle Coulson hard to the ground. He wrestled for the gun, but Coulson's grip was more secure on the pistol.

"Barton, he needs to be stopped!" Coulson reasoned, but Clint didn't want to hear it. In a flash of frustration, he wished he had magic too. He wished he could burn Coulson's hand off his gun, do something, anything! His chest, right under his tattoo began to prickle and heat up, and his whole blood stream began to dart with tongues of flame.

"Damnit Coulson just drop the damn gun! Don't make me hurt you over this!" Clint's pent up anxiety, adrenaline, pounded in his temples.

A small, muted fuchsia light glowed from his palm. It wasn't larger or anymore bright than a lit cigarette but it caused Coulson to recoil and drop the gun, but not before gun went off. The loud shot rang in Clint's his ears.

He didn't need to be Hawkeye to know the shot was right at Sesshomaru's head who didn't appear set for the shot. Of all the rotten goddamn luck…

Thuuuuummmm

Clint didn't know how it happened, or when Tony had picked up the blue sword, but he had it and he threw up a similar forcefield from earlier, refracting the shot high and up.

"Alright, they can stay. Happy Patchy? Jarvis stand down…I'll be in my lab, figuring out who hacked me. No Demons, Gods, Rage Monsters, Agents or…Christ giant reptiles allowed. When Loki turns mammalian again tell him he's on cleanup duty." Tony announced and the tension in the room relaxed. Tony dropped the blue sword and turned sharply to leave the room, Rhodes tight on his heels.
"Good to see we could reach a mostly peaceful resolution. Let's pack it in Hill, Coulson we have a lot to discuss." Fury sounded tired; he didn't blame him. Clint grunted, slowly sitting up from the hard fall he had taken tackling Coulson.

'What was that light from my hand all about? Maybe I'm hallucinating, maybe that twitchy teen barista slipped something in my coffee. That explains the patch of darkness in the sky, my hand lighting up like barbie's dreamhouse…I think I need some air.' Clint tweezed a sliver of broken glass out of his hand and looked the bloody shard like it held answers.

Coulson rebounded up with a spring in his step and looked down on an exhausted Clint with a cold, neutral stare. Yeah, he doubted they were going to go back to friendly terms any time soon.

"Loki, it's over. Feel free to turn back into something more apartment friendly." Clint groaned, and stood up. Loki's long black tail thinned and shortened as he morphed back. In the process, two cartridges popped out of his body, rolling across the floor. One had to have been the sniper round with the toxin, the other from the shot he took as a snake.

Loki didn't bother looking back, he just stood frozen facing Sesshomaru. Fancy Pants, clear-eyed, cut his gaze from Thor to Clint. He eyed him in a way Clint could only say was suspicious.

'Okay come off it Fancy Pants, it's not like I meant for Coulson to shoot you in the head.' Clint rolled his eyes to shake his glare.

Wordlessly, Fancy Pants sheathed his death ray sword, and picked up his blue one and before Clint could really guess at what he was doing, he vaulted out the broken window into the rainstorm.

'Ooh yeah, Squirt, Fury Jr, and Pepper are out there. Man, Pepper is going to let Tony have it…. ' Clint didn't even want to imagine how mad she had to be.

"Thor, allow me to see you—" Thor, face twisted in pain, clutched his bloody shoulder, which veins had begun to turn a sinister black-green. Blood seeped between his fingers, it was bleeding heavy for a puncture wound. Damn, Loki did a number on the big guy.

"I shall be fine Loki, I need not your aid." Thor grumbled out and turned to leave. Loki trailed him as a shadow. Clint sighed, he wasn't going to get involved with that. His own mind still buzzed and had too much cotton stuffed in it.

Hill then started after Fury and Coulson bent down, picking up his gun and other things that had scattered.

Clint looked down at his hands, they were bloody. He didn't know if it was his own blood or whose anymore. He didn't think he got hit… oh the shattered glass. Maybe it was all his blood.

Jittery with unprocessed emotions and high adrenaline, Clint ran for the roof access. Whatever else happened down there could just happen. Fuck this horse mess.

"Clint wait up." Clint heard Nat, but he had no intention on waiting. He needed space, air, a reality check. Something. He didn't need to wait, or hear Nat's explanation of the absolute chaos that was his life right now. He didn't even know how heavy he was breathing until he started up the stairs. His lungs stung.

"Not interested Nat. You can speak to my receptionist, she can probably pencil you in for next Tuesday, that is if you can trust me to remember the appointment." Clint called out, knowing he sounded like a scorned teenager holding a grudge, but he didn't care. Maybe he could pilot the Quinjet solo and just leave.
That sounded wonderful. Escape.

Up on the roof Thor's rainstorm continued to pelt down fat, heavy drops. The rain refreshed him, and he let loose a long, heavy sigh as the blood rinsed from his skin.

'The black smudge is gone from the sky, in fact it looks like a patch of normal daylight. Good sign, I guess. Or bad. Maybe I Hawkeye, am really beginning to see things. Maybe I'm losing my edge.' Clint absentely tweezed another splinter of glass out of his hand with his short nails.

He stood on the roof, scanning across the city, wondering how it could still be operating after everything got thrown so upside down. He stared down at the street below, wondering which one of the black SUV's in the caravan of three Fury was in. Maybe he could spit on it from here.

"Clint, I had no idea." He turned to see Nat standing behind him in the rain, clouds billowing and knocking with distant thunder. They were both still dressed in what they ate bagels in together earlier that morning. He had even gotten Nat her favorite bagel, sesame with light cream cheese and black coffee. He laughed.

He was such a sucker, always such a sucker. This morning he was worried about the bagel guy messing up her breakfast order while she plotted the assassination attempt of his friends.

One of whom, he held in his arms, his own throat swollen in terror, watching his chest wash over in sticky blood. Clint remembered helplessly applying pressure to Loki's chest, knowing that if Loki had been human he'd be long dead by now. Loki's eyes were glassy, his mouth bloody, skin ashen.

'I don't even remember knowing what I yelled at him, I just had to get his attention. I had to get him to notice me. I needed Loki to narrow his eyes in recognition, and wink. Loki had to be ok, I needed him back.' Clint squinted into the sideways rain. He was soaked to the bone, but it reflected his mood.

"Really Nat? You, the best read we have at SHIELD, had no idea? I have a really hard time believing that. I have an easier time believing that it was just easier to ignore, or maybe even you don't trust me." Clint laughed, his voice brittle and dark.

"I don't ignore important things Clint. I unintentionally allowed myself to be too narrowly invested with the invasion and the double agents. Leaving you out of scope had nothing to do with your trustworthiness; you know I never saw you compromised." Nat started to approach Clint and he held out his hand, finger pointed high to stop her.

"First with Loki impersonating Fancy Pants now this…. Why did you let me shoot Loki back then? You never saw it as a matter of honor. Who did? Oh yeah, the Demon Lord who probably only agreed to this whole circus act because like he wasn't going to help his best friend in a stunt like this. You manipulated him real good too." Clint yelled so that none of his words got carried away by the wind. Nat rocked back and straightened.

"You're still on the arrow thing? This isn't a fairy tale Clint! You can't just put ideals like that first over the bigger picture. You didn't need to put arrows in Loki to regain any honor you thought you lost. I didn't think you lost any to begin with, what happened to you was awful but it never should have reflected on you at all. And as for Pretty Boy? He is almost five hundred years old. I think he can make a decision for himself." Nat fired back, her blue eyes positively wild, her hair thrashing in the wind, her black blouse began to shine with rainwater.

"Did you know? Did you know how crazy Tony is about the guy?" Clint asked the obvious
question and Nat rubbed her temple in frustration.

"Pretty Boy told me they slept together, but Tony wanted to keep it strictly casual." Clint laughed and ran a hand through his now soaked hair. This was so messed up.

"Steve was right...wow. Ok, Tony 'commitment-phobe' Stark can't leave Sesshomaru alone for more than three waking hours. Hewigged out on Steve for letting him go after the spaceship solo, and bets on his favorite bands. I don't think that's casual Tony. I can't believe you knew he slept with him and you still didn't tell him." Clint spun around in a circle, wiping rain water off his face, Nat's makeup still held on true to her face, somehow.

"Did you just not hear the conversation we had down there? Tony's infatuation, no matter how short lived for Pretty Boy was secondary to what we needed to accomplish. Do you want to continue to dance around what's really bothering you?" Nat began to sound angry as she pursed her full lips together, the rain began to slowly let up. It wasn't just an infatuation, Tony didn't cave easy and Clint suspected it had everything to do with Fancy Pants being locked up in SHEILD H.Q. or getting a bullet in the skull.

"I'm just peachy. Today is such a great day. I want to wake up and just do it all over again. Should we try again tomorrow?" Clint fired back venomously and Nat crossed the helipad as if to slap him. She stood in his face, taut like a bowstring, eyes icy.

"I had no idea you cared so much for Loki. Something happened between you two, didn't it?" Nat's voice sounded like a baseball bat hitting a fastball for a home run. Clint wiped more rain water off his square face and nodded.

"Yeah. Something did..." Clint caught a suggestive eyebrow quirk from Nat and Clint rolled his eyes. "Don't give me that look. Well, would it have changed anything if you did know?" Clint's voice wrapped around Nat like a lasso.

"I would have found a way to bring you in scope. Tony had the most to lose if this Op went south, or if we didn't do it at all. You can understand that. We're friends Clint. I would never want to put you through something like that, again. Not after Nate and Pietro." Nat put her hand on his shoulder, the same one Loki healed the night before.

He locked eyes with her and he knew when she was lying, probably one of two on the planet who could read her. She told him the truth. He relaxed, feeling like giving up.

"And yet you sat back, doing nothing as Fury threatened to basically imprison him again. What if he's the mole? What if he is trying to get Loki captured by the Other again?" Clint's voice hot met Nat's voice cold.

"Fury didn't want them at SHEILD, Clint. He isn't the mole. My guess is that the last thing he wants is for them to be off grid when the enemy comes back and one ends up getting captured. It was another ploy to call Tony's bluff and to keep us united, as a team. A ploy that almost didn't swing our way. I think I even saw Fury twitch." Nat informed and Clint's eyes widened. That made a lot more sense.

"Fine, you win, per usual. I'm..." Clint trailed off, he didn't even know what to say anymore.

"Totally neck deep in drama involving the biggest diva to ever come to 'Midgard'? You know he is absolutely obsessed with you, Pretty Boy called it from day one. I even taunted Loki about it. Did you see the way he looked at you when Pepper lost her cool?" Nat smirked and Clint wanted to throw himself from the roof. Maybe he could do a flip.
At first, Clint thought Loki was fucking with him. That this was some sort of game to him, tease and win the affections of the sucker archer. Now he wasn't so sure. He knew Nat's previous little speech about how Loki didn't set out to win anyone's trust unless he real wanted it was directed at him.

"No. Not even going there. I'm a simple guy who likes simple things, like hunting… or riding motorcycles, or going to see a hockey game. Loki is about as simple as Fancy Pants is chatty, Tony is sober, or Steve is a Redsox fan. Loki is not what I want, or need, or my type. Besides I don't even like men." Clint put his hands up in in mock surrender. It was way too complicated in an already mucky situation.

'Besides, what if I just like him because he likes me? What if Nat is wrong and this is just a huge game to him? No, this is too risky. I'm better off getting on damn tinder.' Clint smiled wanly, the rain was finally letting up.

Nat snorted and swiped water from her eye, streaking her eye makeup some.

"Lie. If that were true you wouldn't have joined the circus, then joined SHIELD after Pietro. You would have killed me instead of risking your life, to give me a chance. You would have quit after the battle of New York. You would have gone on vacation instead of getting in that Quinjet with me and flying out to New Mexico to investigate a magic signature. You love complicated, and don't try to convince me you don't like Glow Stick. I've never seen you act that way today about anyone, ever. Did you see the look on your face when Loki said 'Jacuzzi'?' Nat listed everything off on her fingers like she was in court. Clint rolled his eyes, it was impossible to have a conversation with her.

"So, you, as a friend, are encouraging me to try to get with Loki, the manic God of Mischief? He is a lightning rod, no offense to Thor, for trouble, disorder, and calamity. He's unstable and… really that's your play? Good to know my friends have my best interests at heart, I think I'll take my chances flinging myself off this rooftop instead." Clint's put his hand to his chin in thought and looked down to the street below.

"Now who's being dramatic? You should give him a chance, and talk to him. Especially about our operation on Asgard. You know he, not Thor, saved Rin and I from Odin. There are some other details he should also let you in on. Together, you two, might work. I'm going back inside, I need a shower, and a massage and you need to find Glow Stick, he should be done playing nursemaid by now." Nat slapped his shoulder and turned to the roof access, the clouds beginning to finally thin out. Clint opened his mouth but he couldn't find a sarcastic retort.

Instead, Clint just shook his head. What choice did he really have? He couldn't avoid Loki forever.

"Awesome Clint. You can reeealally pick 'em. Unbalanced, check. Inhuman, check. America's most wanted, check. Yeah, let's date him. We can just get more ice cream and watch Return of the Jedi and Loki can go off on the terrible tactics of the empire and the rebellion. Ugh. How gross, I'm more focused on this than the global invasion." Clint shoved his hands in his soaked pockets and began to go back inside, wondering where the God of Mischief could even be.

Poof ffft.

In a whirl of pine scented magic, cool hands grabbed his shoulders and he instantly found himself in Loki's room.

Well that certainly didn't take long.
"Good to see your magic is back. Thanks for orchestrating one of the worst days of my life, five out of five stars." Clint found the words pouring out of his mouth, attacking a positively manic Loki. His green eyes darted over him like a swarm of bees. Loki pursed his lips, finally focusing back onto Clint's brown eyes, locking in like he might break down if he gave up eye contact.

"Yes, somewhat back… I wish… I mean to… I'd like to collect my billiards wager from you." Loki stammered completely inarticulately. Clint almost called him out on it, but Loki's hands were trembling. Loki ran a pale hand through his long hair, pushing it back in a nervous reaction.

Loki was a wreck. A wreck over him. Good, because he was a wreck too.

'Nat was right. Of course, per usual. Loki looks like he has no idea what to do, and this guy probably makes a plan before he takes a leak.' Clint sighed. He wanted Loki being a strung-out mess to make him feel better, but it didn't.

"Wow. You want more from me? After all of that? You shot yourself, made an ass out of me… then lost your mind turned into giant snake… And you want something from me? I'm out of here, your ego…." Clint started to leave and Loki stiffened and moved in front of him.

"You misunderstand. I don't want anything from you, except an opportunity to give you something. Besides, I was under the assumption that you no longer wanted me near you. I didn't think…" Loki faltered as if the words caught in his throat.

"Oh, I'm Loki, strategist extraordinaire and I didn't think' just who are you trying to fool? I'm not a damn kid. You think more than Steve works out or Pepper cleans up Tony's public image. I know you thought it'd be easier to run than to talk to me. You thought it'd be easier to get yourself shot than to work through what people thought of you. You thought it'd be easier to turn into a giant snake to get the attention off of Bruce and Fancy Pants than let them handle themselves. But, look at what happened! You can't just run or… you can't make yourself the most hated guy in the room anymore to solve problems. It's not working. We don't hate you, well Coulson does and Hill might, but, we don't. I… don't." There. He said it. He said he didn't hate Loki and it sounded so gross, like he was some tween.

"Ah, you think I am a coward." Loki thinned his lips and Clint furrowed his brow and his stomach sunk. Idiot.

"Do you purposely twist everything I say into something negative, or is that just another perk of being me? I think you're a self-destructive dick with anger management issues, not a coward. I certainly don't think you're some monster, or some stupid title 'broken blade' the scepter used to call you. Get over that." Clint's tone came out much harsher than he meant and he caught Loki's stunned expression.

"It was far more expedient to have me be the target, and it mattered the least to most." Loki rocked back on his heels, appearing to be waiting for something.

"There could have been other options. You also didn't have to go full-tilt crazy. You could have … I don't know, looked for different options. You saw my tattoo, right? That was for my brother Nate. He was only seventeen when he died. My brother also thought shooting himself mattered the least to most." Clint abruptly closed his mouth. He didn't mean to admit that to Loki. Awkward.

Loki closed the distance between them with a few strides of his long, lean legs.

"I refuse to argue the point, but I will not leave you to face the Mad Titan's fleet alone. You underestimate me if you think three Midgardian bullets can stop me so." Loki reached out to touch
Clint, but stopped just short. Clint grabbed his hand anyway, the action mirroring when Loki 'shushed' him after he healed his shoulder.

The cuts on his hand healed in a Christmas scented puff of smoke.

"You know, as 'the Dude' would say, You're not wrong, Loki; You're just an asshole. No more of that crap. No more plausible deniability. No more making me think you're dead. You owe me big, 8-ball wager be damned." Clint bit out and Loki's face lit up and he laughed, and magic sparking from his fingertips. Clint had seen Loki do this before, but he had never been the one to make him laugh that way.

"Then, Clint, allow me to make it up to you." Loki grinned wickedly and disappeared in a flash of green.

Um ok.

Then Clint felt a presence behind him and all the sudden two arms snaked around his sides from behind, left hand splayed across his chest, the right at his collarbone and neck. Clint absolutely froze, his skin prickled as if freezing and fire at the same time. Every hair stood on end as Loki breathed in his left ear, soft lips grazing his ear lobe. Loki's chest pressed flush up against his board rigid back.

Clint didn't even breathe.

"I desire to make it up to you by satisfying you." Loki's voice sounded velvet and forbidden as his lips traveled down from his ear, to the left side of his neck. Clint exhaled sharply when Loki's hand on his chest began to inch downwards on his wet shirt while the other gently pushed his jaw up.

'Holy God I am in such trouble. I am never listening to Nat again.' Clint gasped inadvertently as Loki's lips kissed the valley where his neck met his shoulder, his tongue flicking out swirling and lips sucking, a preview for what surely Loki meant to give on later.

"Loki…" Damnit Clint you couldn't just only say his name! "Makeup sex huh? If you're only doing this because I'm mad at you, I don't want it. I'm tired of your games." Clint wanted to punch himself in the face. That was what he came up with? Really?!

Clint started to turn around but Loki held him in place, lips curling into a smirk on his skin. Clint finally found Loki's arms, stopping them, his skin burned in anger and arousal. He slapped one hand on Loki's left that now reached dangerously close to his pants, and grabbed his right forearm.

"This is no game to me Clint. These actions I took today, I did to protect you. I wish to treat you, because you are precious to me and I want you. I will invoke a hunger so carnal you'll forget how food tastes. If you will have me." Loki's soft lips left a trail of buzzing, and needy kisses from his shoulders up to his jawbone and Clint anger fled like a crowd after a show.

'Precious? What? Really? What in the he-' Clint's thoughts froze as something that was most assuredly not a flashlight, poked his ass.

"Will you have me Clint?" Loki asked, voice a blend of sultry and husky ribbons. Clint's groin warmed and twitched and Clint's mouth opened and his throat swelled shut. Loki began to suck harder, his teeth raking his skin and lips spreading and pawing.

'Loki hasn't even done anything yet and I am already freezing up like a virgin. Well, to be honest I haven't ever had sex with a guy before. I am so screwed. Literally.' Clint tensed up. Loki had obviously done this before with a guy, but he had no idea what to do. He was going to be made an
ass of, again.

"Well?" Loki prompted again, and Clint could feel the teasing tone through his lips. Loki was either oblivious to Clint's nervousness, or just chose to ignore it. Clint went with the latter as Loki moved his own hand from under Clint's to finally reach Clint's belt and with a curl of green magic the belt slipped off and flung into the chair across the room. Clint subconsciously flexed his abs, making room between his pants and his body.

Was his body betraying him…or did he really want this this badly?

Clint couldn't find his voice. This felt right, more than right. But he had no idea if this was going to blow up in his face later.

His wet dress shirt disappeared, and Loki's as well. Loki's bare chest pressed up against his wet back, his defined pecks against his lats. Loki continued to suck and swirl kisses, while holding his jaw up with long, probably double jointed fingers. His neck could fry an egg Loki made him so hot.

With no warning, Loki's hand shot down his pants, leaving his hand now on his wrist. Loki's fingers brushed through his body hair, under his boxers, finding his stiffening cock.

Clint sucked in another breath. How long had he wanted this?!

"I…" Clint started, regretting how he sounded already and Loki stopped, picking up on his hesitation. Quick and strong as a panther he relinquished all body contact with Clint, his skin immediately cooling. For a flash of a moment Clint thought Loki left him just standing there, but green eyes blazed on him like the sun off a snowy peak.

Clint instantly missed his touch, not knowing how much he had been craving, waiting for it til now. He immediately spun around to see Loki only in his leather pants, his hard dick tenting them. A devilish gleam and grin overtook his features.

"Which female form would you like me to take? I have seen many popular, pretty ones on your advertisements. How about this one?" Instantly Loki turned into a topless Scarlett Johansson. Clint blinked in confusion, about to protest. That wasn't what he meant, that's not why he hesitated.

"Or this one?" Loki's voice was suddenly a smokey alto as he shifted into a very real Natalie Portman, running a manicured hand through his now super long, dark brown hair. Clint fought a growing frustration and lost his hard-on, which was equally confusing considering since both women were gorgeous. Yet, Clint knew why he suddenly got soft.

'There is, I guess, no really use denying it. I want Loki. Wow, didn't see that one coming a month ago, damn you Fancy Pants, and Nat.' Clint watched as Loki began to sway hips that weren't his, and touch breasts that certainly weren't either.

"Name attributes you like. I can be quite crea—" Loki's voice sang out feminine and sweet, and it was all wrong. Loki batted his now hazel eyes playfully and licked his red painted lips and Clint had enough.

"Shift back to you. I told you before, you should stay you. Be you." Clint snapped, and immediately Loki flashed back to himself, face slack in shock and disbelief. He stopped swaying and simply stared.

'Is that what he really thinks?! That I only want to have sex with him because he can look like any beautiful woman? He thinks I'm that shallow?' Clint searched Loki's face, and saw complete and utter disbelief and barely hidden joy. It wasn't about him. This. This was about Loki.
This was about the whole 'King of Monsters' thing. Someone as confident as Loki shouldn't ever have that look in his eyes.

Clint decided then, in Stark Tower, still wet from Thor's rainstorm, he was going to give this a shot. It wasn't because he thought he lost him today, and it wasn't just because the look that Loki gave him shattered something deep inside him.

He wanted this just as much, he just didn't have the stones that Loki had to be upfront about it. He wanted to see Loki bend, he wanted to see Loki's face explode in ecstasy, and he wanted to be the one to melt him into the bed. He wanted his sly smiles to land on him.

'At some point during Loki's stay, the idea of me sparring touching, or straddling anyone else just lost a lot of appeal. I waited for Loki rather than sparring with Steve. And I don't want Loki to want to do those things with anyone else over me.' Clint swallowed, and committed.

Clint moved fast, faster than Loki anticipated. Clint grabbed the back of Loki's head and the small of his back and joined themselves together with their lips. Clint slanted his lips over Loki's and forced his tongue in messily. Clint drove them both back, hitting the wall behind them, bed to his left.

The force of them hitting the wall probably caused his lip to bleed, and a few knuckles on his hand on the back of Loki's head to scrape open and bruise, but he didn't care. He had a point to make. He swirled and curled his tongue in Loki's mouth.

He tasted like pine and winter and he wanted to devour him more. He greedily ran his hands through Loki's thick, disheveled hair. Hastily, Clint kneaded his lips against Loki's, flicking his tongue deep in his mouth like a flag at a bull.

Loki moaned deeply, mouth purring against his and Clint got rock hard again immediately, his cock straining his trousers. Loki reciprocated the kiss with a gusto Clint hadn't been subjected to in a long time. Loki's left arm looped under Clint's right and rubbed down his back while his other hooked around his neck. Loki's embrace convinced Clint that he thought he was made of steel because he might just bruise a rib from his vice-like hold.

Clint grunted back, shoving his right hand down the backside of Loki's leather pants, gripping and cupping his smooth, toned ass, squeezing it like a stress ball. His cock spurted wet. He usually had better control than this, yet with Loki he was sure to lose it all.

Clint felt their pants and boxers somehow disappear. Cheater. Wait when did his shoes disappear?

"Cheater. Magic is cheating." Clint pulled back, getting air, his breath coming in rasps in between words. Clint gripped his ass harder as Loki's left arm raised up and swung down, slapping and gripping his own ass with a firm smack.

Loki's eyes looked like a jungle, all green, secrets and teeming with life. Blue flecks, like shards of glass, eclipsed pupils dilated in lust. He lifted Clint's chin again and sucked his adams apple with swollen lips, as he was trying to separate it from his body and swallow it whole.

"This isn't your gym Clint; this is my domain." Loki's lips split like a crescent and his eyes blazed as he dropped to his knees like a dancer. With Loki's left hand still on his ass, and his right hand grazing down his torso and down to his groin Clint knew he was done. His knees already weakened into pudding and Loki hadn't even started.

Loki's hand finally brushed through his thankfully trimmed pubic hair again down to his balls and
with another slap on his ass and a hand cupping his balls Clint shouted. Clint planted one of his hands against the wall to steady himself, the other on Loki's head. In Loki's right hand pooled warm oil. Loki smoothly and slowly massaged it on his sack, warming it like a sunny day.

"Ahhh, Loki, please." Clint's voice sounded desperate and he didn't care, because he was. His whole body flared, tingled for Loki and Loki needed to know that.

Loki spread the oil around the base of his throbbing cock and sack and, damn what was this stuff?! Good. Too good. Loki made a ring with his thumb and index finger, continuing to cup his balls with his other fingers. Clint could cum right then, and this was just the warm up before the big game.

"Please what, Clint?" Loki's breath panted hot on the tip of his penis and Clint growled in frustration. He glared down at the God who gazed right back up, licking his lips with a flick of a tongue. He was all challenging mischief.

Screw you!

"Please stop being a such damn tease." Clint's voice dripped with need and Loki merely narrowed his eyes, dancing in mirth. He stopped cupping Clint's sack and grinned wildly, just like a cat would that caught prey.

"Is that a challenge?" Loki licked his lips, his voice coy and husky.

'He is going to make me say it! Damn I never stood a chance, he is going to own me. He is making it sound like I'm the one ordering him around, but…that's not true.' Clint bit his lip.

"It's an earnest request. Suck me dry Loki. Now." Clint ordered with what he hoped with some authority and Loki's lips sealed around the tip of his penis and the same tongue looped and swirled counterclockwise.

When Loki's cheeks hollowed out and he sucked like a Dyson, Clint flinched.

'Fuck Loki is hot, this is too much, I have got to hold it together.' Clint took a deep inhale of humid air to steady his thoughts. As Loki started a quick, bobbing rhythm his knees shook. Loki massaged his sack again, tightening the ring around the base of his dick. Clint moaned deep and heady.

"With pleasure." Loki came up, voice like a threat. He descended back down, taking all of Clint in his mouth. Clint gripped Loki's hair, he was breathing way too hard for a blow job. Loki ran his pointed tongue along the sensitive underside seam of his cock. The seal of his vacuumed lips and the white hot of his mouth hitting his warm, lubed fingers bucked Clint's body into a full body twitch like he touched a live wire.

"God Loki, You're good!" Clint was not usually vocal in bed, but he couldn't restrain himself. He bit down on his thumb, he couldn't cum yet. Loki would think he couldn't handle anything. Clint tried to cycle through the startup process of the Quinjet to distract himself. He just couldn't think of the cream skinned, green eyed God literally on his knees for him, giving him anything, everything he could want.

It was then Loki started to pick up speed and his knees softened into a buckle, this wasn't good, he couldn't endure this much longer, Loki's hot, talented tongue continued to rib up and down his seam. That oil, oh man that oil, his sack felt like heaven, and that ring around his base, please don't stop Loki.

The suction…it was…inhuman. He had to have more.
"Don't stop. Don't." Clint plead, knowing that he would have to get this God back later, he couldn't sound like some damsel in a terribly written smut novel. Loki's lips curved up on the head of his dick, and the hand that had been gripping his ass slid down to his taint, right behind his balls and apply pressure upwards.

Shit! Loki! That's…Clint's mind fuzzed. Loki's head bobbed back and forth as he continued the pressure father back with three fingers. Through all of this Loki kept up his rhythm and caressing, god he could multi task. Clint was about undone when the first finger tabbed at his entrance.

'Oh no, he couldn't be…' was the last coherent thought Clint had when the oil appeared on Loki's other hand and warmed up his entrance, slicking it and making it relax. Loki's lips left his dick with a pop, flicking the tip of his trembling, red cock, about to blow.

"Do you want it Clint?" Loki hummed, his voice vibrating the room and Clint looked down in shock and in aching, trembling need. Loki's finger circled his entrance, like a plane about to land.

"Yes! Loki. I want you in me!" Clint's order unfortunately sounded more like begging with his voice wavering. Loki's eyes flashed with magic, glowing like Jaguar's would at night and his lips slid tight down his shaft. As soon as the first finger entered his ass and Clint bucked, a yell caught in his throat like on a roller coaster. His toes curled and he would have fallen over already if his hand wasn't against the wall. His other hand still tangled in Loki's hair, forgotten.

His finger slowly swirled inside him like a stirrer in a drink and he had no choice but to soften onto him. Like his whole body responded to everything he did with yielding permission. Loki took all of his cock inside his wet mouth again, humming. When the second finger entered, they curled up deep to find that one spot.

"Shit! Lo…yes!" Clint couldn't hold on any longer, his jaw went slack and he closed his eyes.

Loki long fingers curled up and applied pressure on his prostate, and his mouth vacuumed back up his shaft, tip of his tongue dragging down that one seam.

Clint came, and came hard. He saw stars and his whole body convulsed.

"Loki! God ahh." Clint emptied all he had into Loki's mouth. Clint's breath rocked heavy in the pine scented air, he didn't even care he didn't last as long as he usually did. Loki was that good, that mind blowingly incredible. Clint wanted more of him. He almost collapsed when Loki rose up, eyes meeting his, both pairs of eyes wide in lust.

Clint crashed his mouth down on his, bringing them flush together. Clint grabbed at what he could on Loki. He raked his nails down his back, he gripped his toned ass hard. He tasted himself in his mouth and felt Loki's unattended need prodding him hard on the groin. The kiss grew desperate and breathy as Loki lowered them both down on the bed, Loki on top, looking down through the curtain of his hair, eyes mapping Clint's face.

"Do you want this Clint? Do yo—" Loki sounded almost unsure as his cock moved against Clint's leg and Clint unconsciously moved his legs apart to accommodate it. An unspoken invitation.

"You better fuck me, Loki." Loki flashed him an animalistic grin as he crashed his lips down on him once more. Loki's tongue plowed deep in Clint's mouth, possessive and hungry. Loki's hands swept up to his elbows, pressing them to either sides of his head, trapping him down. Clint moaned and Loki's own voice vibrated the kiss as laughed back. Loki raised up smiling broadly, cheeks flushed, eyes dark. Clint saw then, exactly what everyone else missed when they first saw him.
"Oh, I shall." Loki improved his posture. Straddling him, black hair wild, emerald eyes burning, was a God. Every inch, every chiseled line, every swerve of his muscles, every curve of his face. His cream skin, dark hair, and sparkling smile made him every bit of a God as Thor.

'No. Definitely more. He is what he wanted Gods to look like. Loki is what Gods should want to be.' Clint wondered when he had become such a sap.

"I missed it." Clint gasped. Loki moved back and off the bed. Standing in front of Clint, he spread his thighs apart, fingers still coated in that stupid good magic oil. Clint shuddered as long fingers made their way up to his entrance again, warming and relaxing it. The other hand poised over Clint's cock, green magic spreading out of it like a vine. Clint recovered to hockey stick hard in record time. His cock throbbing, red and ready back to life.

'Magic. Magic is definitely cheating. There is just no way I'd could literally up for another round without it.' Clint let loose a high pitched moan.

"Miss what, Clint?" Loki finally asked. He inserted his oil slicked fingers back into Clint, almost as if a punishment for being vague, like it was reserved for Loki only. Clint grunted slightly, adjusting and relaxing while at the same time prepping his mind for round two.

"You're what Gods should be." Clint rasped out and Loki paused in his scissoring of his opening. Clint opened his eyes to see that Loki's magic had laced the room with green and coiling vines, complete with wide, heart shaped leaves, sparkling and verdant. The whole steamy room smelled like Christmas, all that was missing was candles.

Though, something in Loki's facial expression looked crushed and elated at the same time. Clint filtered through his lust filled thoughts to come up with what he said that could made Loki look so sad.

"Mmm, flattery will get you nowhere, Clint." Loki recovered, winking, shoving whatever emotion Clint saw away as he slipped another finger inside of him. Clint's back arched on the bed as the third finger reached his prostate, rubbing it and causing his now hard cock to rock up towards his own torso.

"—Got me this far." Clint breathed back as the fingers fully prepped him and Loki leaned forward, and Clint held a breath in as the oil warmed, blunt suede tip greeted his relaxed entrance. Loki's eyes danced and Clint used his arms to search for anything that could give him leverage. He almost got to the head board when something tingly wrapped around his wrists and pinned them above his head to the bed.

The green magic!

"Damn, you cheater!" Loki grabbed his hips and with his commendable strength pulled his ass to the edge of the bed, magicking a pillow under his hips. Loki stood, holding Clint's calves against his shoulders, legs almost flat against his body.

"That's more like it." Loki's face took on that feral edge. He slowly, oh so slowly, thrust his hips forward, and as a result, his cock inched into Clint. Clint couldn't move, couldn't think. He bit his lip as fiery pain of stretching so much around Loki's thick cock, hit.

Then in an instant it was gone, Loki coiled more magic down near his entrance, and the abrasive friction, the dull ache vanished, replaced by a mind blanking bliss.

'How had I never done this till now?' Clint unfortunately knew he was completely at Loki's mercy,
which he knew personally he didn't have a lot of. Clint groaned as his ass filled up with Loki's dick and his jaw slackened. He blubbered out some nonsense, pulling at his magic restraints, unable to find anyway to move against or respond to Loki's movements.

"Loki, let me go." Clint moaned as Loki pushed further inside him, almost too deep.

'How big is Loki? Is he trying to split me in two?' Clint heard Loki tut and saw him put a finger to his lips.

"My wager, my domain, remember?" Loki's eyes danced and Clint wished he could throw something at him as he inhaled again through his teeth. This was too much and not enough. He wanted to touch Loki, he wanted to have as much of him touching him as possible.

Clint heard Loki shutter a gasp and grinned at the God who looked down at him, whole body the shape of an L, with the back of his legs flush against the God's body.

Loki's face, lax and eyebrows slanted, found his desire. He began to slowly thrust in and out, balls slapping against the back of Clint's ass and Clint's cock got wet, fast.

"Oh—Cli—Clint." He heard Loki's broken voice make his name five syllables long. He said his name like someone begging for mercy. Loki sped up the tempo, and they locked eyes. And Clint saw the leaves on the wall begin to curl and tendrils of green magic bud out.

Clint wanted to see Loki lose himself, wanted to see him quiver, sputter, and cave into ruin. Clint tightened his muscles down there, increasing the friction and Loki's gaze hardened knowing it was on purpose. Clint shrugged and winked back. Loki swung his hips back out to just his tip, then threw his full force back into the nest thrust, pounding into him.

Clint's vision blacked out at the edges, his whole body sparked in intense sensitivity and he regretted challenging the god when he held the upper hand as he did. Clint still refused to call out. He had uttered enough embarrassing sounds and admissions, thank you.

At least until Loki, with hands still slippery, grabbed his stick straight cock and pumped and pounded to the same tempo.

'Where did this guy learn how to multi-task?' Clint let loose a full body shudder and he locked eyes with Loki again, Loki upping the tempo slightly with a sly smirk.

"Damn you, Diva." Clint couldn't take much more of this, with each rolling thrust his mind whited out and his vision blurred. Ripples of pleasure arced through him as Loki stroked his cock wet from the oil and his own fluids. He wanted to hang on though, he had to wait for Loki.

He couldn't cum twice before him. He'd never live it down.

Then, deep within him, he felt a twinge and a flick. Loki was close, Loki's back bucked and his rhythm went haywire.

"Damn I'm—" Clint gasped as one hand ringed his cock and the other hand twisted and pumped at the same time. He wouldn't last long the second time either. "Gonna so get you back for this Loki. You have no idea." Clint another jolt of warmth and pleasure burst out as Loki changed his angle.

Clint's throat went dry and he mouthed Loki's name again. He heard Loki gasp out, almost feminine, lips swollen and soft, mouth a large 'o'. The magic vines around the room began to unfurl.
"Clint, I...the Nines!" Loki eyes blazed and his body bent like a strung bow. Loki released himself deep inside Clint. Clint never felt more satisfied or completed from a sex act in his life.

Loki’s face, soft, slack, and open had never been more readable to Clint. Like he could read his every thought, or predict what he’d say next.

This wasn't just a wager for Loki. He meant what he said earlier.

Clint’s chest pooled with a jellying warmth as Loki’s cock began to settle out. The flowers bloomed and as quickly as they did they faded. Loki's body warped in elation, his smile lit his face like a beachside bonfire.

Loki’s shoulders relaxed, and with a few slow, teasing pumps, Clint found his next release immanent. How could he not after seeing Loki like that? He had to see that again.

"Loki!" Clint threw his head back, back arching, arms still restrained. He spurted up and over Loki's hand with a voice high. He smelled a new whiff of pine again as Loki slowly retracted out of him. Loki removed the vine restraints and cleaned up the sticky mess with a poof of magic.

'Um, well, that just happened. I swear if he leaves and teleports away from me or something I'm gonna kill him. But like hell am I going to ask him to stay like I'm needy.' Clint studied Loki as his legs fell to either side of Loki.

Loki cautiously, almost like he was approaching a live bomb, sprawled almost cat-like next to Clint. He appraised him like one would an artifact and released the restraints.

Pause.

Clint moved his arms, putting his hands under his head, elbows sticking out. He turned his head to Loki, who was idly tracing his finger up and down the sheets which suddenly became really interesting.

For uncountable minutes they just looked at each other, the other not knowing what to say, if anything at all. Was Loki waiting for him to say something? Just a little awkward. Or maybe it wasn't awkward and Clint was just making the silence awkward.

Screw it. He was going to say something.


"Black mamba, not cobra." Loki corrected. "They're far deadlier than your cobras, I would know, Sho and I fought our fare share of various Snake Demons. I chose it because Agent Coulson called me one and mortals fear them intrinsically." Loki elaborated, scrunching his nose.

"Yeah, well don't do that again. And don't listen to Coulson, I think he is a little biased." Clint smirked and playfully flicked Loki's shoulder.

"As are you. Though, you'd be surprised. Your mortal tales have me fathering a giant sea serpent." Loki quirked a grin and before Clint could ask a follow up question he explained. "A long story, rest assured, I have fathered no such creature, nor a wolf, a ruler of the underworld, or the Norns, given birth to a horse. Safe to say mortals, loved to weave the Demons and Gods together in various lore. When they vanished and their memories along with them...their characters in our stories simply warped and became other things." Loki's eyes lost focus on Clint's chest, as he took Clint's hand and peppered it with biting kisses.
Clint thought for a moment. He wondered how crushing it would be to have someone you considered a brother simply vanish. Vanish along with every trace of their existence and anyone else of their race and no one remember them.

And how Loki must feel to have him back, but in a world where the same problem exists.

"They just disappeared huh? That had to be tough for you. Don't worry, I won't bring it up to Fancy Pants. But I'm serious, no more animals, I was an acrobat not a lion trainer." Clint reassured and Loki nodded, biting and sucking one of his knuckles.

"Your other tattoo, on your calf, 'quicksilver’… " Loki began and Clint chuckled heartily, deep and rich. Loki reared his head back in confusion.

"That too is a looooong story. Remember the gambling acrobat I mentioned that you reminded me of? That one was for him." Clint bent his leg up and absentely scratched the inked calligraphy with the hand currently not being gnawed on.

"I'm not a chew toy, you vampire." Clint kicked at Loki when he bit too hard.

"I mean to… I wish to..." Loki's eyes darted up to Clint's and Clint just laughed.

"You aren't very articulate in 'your domain' you know." Clint said, with his best Loki impression for 'your domain'. Clint continued to laugh as he propped himself up better to look at Loki. He was splayed nude and soft, like a water color painting.

"I want to know what you thought of this, what you're thinking." Loki scowled eyebrows furrowing and Clint stopped laughing.

"I'm thinking that..." Clint led lowly. How much should he torture Loki over this? He could say it didn't come close to making up anything, but he had the feeling the God of Lies would pick up on that lie.

Loki tensed.

"We should get cleaned up and get some food. Lunch… dinner whatever time it is." In an action Clint had used before, sprung on top of Loki with a quick slide and flip. He straddled him their sweaty, spent bodies sticking against each other slightly as Clint' mouth came down upon Loki's open lips.

"I did forget what food tastes like after all." Clint confessed with a cheeky grin, breaking apart the kiss.

Loki smiled saucily and leaned up, biting a harsh kiss on Clint's neck which could easily hickey. Before Clint could protest, Loki summoned his magic and in a puff of Christmas scented smoke, he teleported them both to the shower.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you liked it!!!! ;) surprise Clint and Loki action

sorry about the delay in updating, work got crazy and I went on vacation for Chinese New Year!!!
please let me know how you liked this chapter :)
-TL
Sesshomaru and the Trust Fall

Sesshomaru and the Trust Fall

*(*)

Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles as Thor's waning rainstorm whipped his damp, bloody hair and wet his bruised skin. His thoughts burned in the base of his skull and a headache began to cradle his temples. Not to mention his shoulder absolutely crushed with a dull, blunt pain.

His clavicle was most certainly broken, and shoulder dislocated. His left arm hang loose and it eerily reminded him of his previous scry. If only that wretched poison hadn't hampered his healing and Tenseiga wasn't angered that he was going to slay Fury, possibly others, he would be fully healed by now.

Worthless vassal.

Tenseiga grumbled.

Sesshomaru never more wanted to level a mountain. The whole day was a complete confusing disaster. He should have never told Stark he would stay. Such a promise reduced his freedom, not to mention not only did Stark clearly not want him in his fortress any longer, but he looked down on him.

A human looked down on him! It wasn't as if others, like his father or mother hadn't done so before, but never had a human been condescending towards him. If he wasn't going mad; he was losing his edge. Especially because such a thought twisted his gut in a knot.

'You look like a joke.' 'Can't you just be normal for once?' The words Stark sneered to him this morning troubled him more than he thought necessary.

Loki wore his colors: black and green. Lords and nobility always wore their representative colors when conversing, he had done so the entire of his time in this realm. He conceded to wear the humans' typical garb of this time, only without those 'ties' which Loki also disliked. Polly had noticed he only wore red or white, how did Stark not notice this pattern when he clearly was more intelligent?

'If so, then when he donned the copy of my yukata and hakamas, maybe Loki had been right. Maybe it was in mockery of me. He views me as a mere joke, a trick, a fling.' Sesshomaru frowned, he wouldn't tolerate anyone mocking him.

And normal? He was a Demon Lord, the only Demon left aside from Jaken. He had no chance to be this 'human normalcy' Stark desired and had no wish to be. Sesshomaru would always be elite. He would not lower himself to this human normalcy. Not for anyone, including Stark.

'Clearly he has expectations this Sesshomaru has no inclination on fulfilling. But there are more pressing matters at hand. Such as the portion of the Astral Plane Bakusaiga and I summoned and Barton's awoken purification magic. What in the Four Lands did Loki do to the archer to awaken a power so dormant even I didn't sense?' Sesshomaru landed neatly in the devastated building, leather boots crunching on debris.
Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes and wrinkled his nose, finding the immediate object of his search: Banner.

It wasn't curiosity nor worry that impelled him to seek out Banner. In truth, he wanted to test him in his true form, a spar so to speak. If he couldn't level a mountain, perhaps a good fight with the green giant would suffice.

Needless to say, Sesshomaru inwardly huffed in disappointment when he found Banner had reverted to less 'spar worthy' form. However, he was close to Stark, he may be able to ask Banner what exactly it was Stark wanted now. He clearly had little idea except he no longer wanted him there.

"Your indecency offends me. Cloth yourself properly in my presence Banner." Sesshomaru placidly ordered to the human who was presently clad in little more than rags. He had been transforming into this form for how long and hadn't learned how to fashion appropriate garments?

Sesshomaru's right ear twitched. The bullet destroyed the hearing device affixed to it and had carved large portion out of it. He removed the one on his left ear and immediately a racket clanged in his ears.

He would have to get used to it, Stark would no doubt be reluctant to repair the device. He also had nothing to barter with.

"Oh yeah, next time I'll make sure to transform near an Armani. And it's not like you're looking decent either." Banner smiled weakly and checked the pulse on a soldier who had been knocked unconscious.

Sesshomaru ignored Banner's implication that he resembled anything less than acceptable. He did not dress to impress the humans, nor did he need to.

"The human soldier lives Banner. You controlled your form well enough. Far from perfect, though it seems Loki requires more practice than you." Sesshomaru set his jaw, he hadn't seen Loki creature shift in a long time, and apparently, his friend had made little improvement in controlling the instincts of his forms. He even interrupted his fight with Thor and sided with him.

This would most certainly spark more animosity between the brothers.

"Wow, did you just pay me a compliment? Are you sure you don't have a concussion?" Banner stood from his squatting position. Sesshomaru resisted the urge to crack his whip at the human.

"My teaching methods are second to none." Sesshomaru barely let a small smirk grace his features despite the arduous day and Banner chuckled. Banner, for a typically conflict avoidant human, certainly took a solid stance to prevent Loki from being sent to SHIELD's dungeons. Sesshomaru respected Banner's opinion, any organization so easily infiltrated with spies was one Sesshomaru could not trust.

"Did you know Loki could do that?" Banner asked and Sesshomaru nodded.

"Surely. He seldom creature shifts and when he did so, it was for game playing. He prefers fish, dragons, or large felines. He never once shifted into a snake, and only once for battle before now. This Sesshomaru ascertains he did so to frighten and intimate the humans into capitulating his terms." Sesshomaru's hearing began to sort itself out. He could hear over a great distance, which is why he knew that they were about to be interrupted.

Sesshomaru heard another familiar human approach from the hallway and smelled him long before
Banner noticed his approach. Fury.

"It very nearly worked, Mr. Nirvana. It's close to a miracle you helped Dr. Banner this much. You saved the lives this tact team." Fury stepped in the room and Sesshomaru heard Banner's pulse speed up. Sesshomaru took a few steps, ignoring the grinding in his dislocated shoulder.

Two other nameless humans crept by and carried the unconscious soldier away.

"Do not attempt to flatter this Sesshomaru, conniving human. You live by the Gods and Tenseiga's graces alone." Sesshomaru bit also interrupted his attack. He would certainly finish their fight later, he would not let such a transgression go unpunished. Sesshomaru also referenced Loki because didn't want to think of the amount of nagging and annoyance he would have to endure from Loki if he killed Fury.

Tenseiga, similarly, would sulk for months if he didn't revive him, of that Sesshomaru was sure. Sesshomaru had an itching feeling he would need Tenseiga to be obedient when the Mad Titan arrived. Sesshomaru, however, didn't like the feeling that his freedom had become so contained. In his time, if he wanted a human dead, they were dead.

Apparently, not in this time. Well, except that one human Coulson who Barton almost purified. Tenseiga reviled him.

"What are you doing here Fury? I doubt you personally come around to get your agents who disobey your orders." Banner sounded exhausted and weary. Sesshomaru agreed it was doubtful he simply came for his fallen soldier whose selfish comrades left behind.

"I came to set the record straight. I didn't order the tact team, and I sure as hell didn't order a surveillance hack on Stark Tower. I'm going to get to the bottom of this." Fury pointed to Sesshomaru and slid a large bag towards Banner.

"Figured you'd both need a change of clothes, and perhaps a Med kit." Fury added flicking his right ear pointedly and Sesshomaru hid a growl. How dare this human imply he needed anything from them. Sesshomaru's own right ear flicked back as if to say it was fine, but more blood dripped down his neck.

"Yeah, well that's great and all but it doesn't help that Tony's tower was shot up, and that he—"

Banner motioned to Sesshomaru. "almost got a headshot because of it. We can't trust SHIELD, or you." Banner said, while picking out of the large bag a pair of trousers. Sesshomaru wished that Banner didn't have to take what this Fury was offering him, but he would not stand Banner in his indecent state.

Sesshomaru also wouldn't stand this Fury speaking to him as if things could be so easily fixed.

"You manipulated Loki and Stark for your own gain. You incensed Loki to creature shift, something he is not apt to do, by bartering with me. You waged war in Stark's fortress thus threatening his sovereignty. Your words are worthless." Sesshomaru dismissed with a flick of his right wrist, talons glowing green. He would have to work diligently to build up a better resistance, or even better immunity to Loki's poison, Blitzen.

"You're right, I did manipulate them, and not only for my own gain, but for all of Earth's. If I thought we had a better shot of defeating this threat with you, 'Real Power' and Mr. Nirvana scattered across the globe, and not trying to resolve your issues, I wouldn't have risked my own neck. Look, I'll level with you. I'll give you the intel I got from one of the sniper agents." Fury strode up to Sesshomaru who set himself and pooled his whip to the ground. His left arm still hang
unuselessly, but he refused to reset it and show weakness.

"...Well, it'd be the first-time SHIELD came clean to me. Why tell us? Why not Natasha or Clint?" Banner had tugged on pants and an oversized t-shirt.

"Think of it as an olive branch Dr. Banner. I need to know we can work together going into the future." Fury admitted, hands at his sides and Banner just crossed his arms.

"Save your breath for Tony and Steve, Fury. They're the ones who need it." Banner insisted and Sesshomaru rather liked that Banner showed backbone towards this Fury, but was not easily baited into a rage.

"I got something else in mind for them. Look at this image one of the SHIELD spotters in this building managed to capture before you scared them out of their skin." Fury held forth his cellphone and Banner's eyes narrowed.

"Now, I may only have one eye, but that to me looks like a space irregularity, not unlike the portal we saw over New York three years ago." Fury turned again towards Banner who straightened. Sesshomaru didn't need to look at Fury's image to know what he had captured had to have been the small window of the Astral Plane he summoned.

He had only seen the Astral Plane window appear twice before. Once when his mother restrained him in her Kingdom, the other when his mother reclaimed a debt he owed her.

"My son, you certainly look more the part of Lord of the Western Lands than before. You still lack much power, but you have Tenseiga so suppose this will do for now." Sesshomaru's mother appraised him with a delicate eyebrow lifted and Sesshomaru couldn't have been more disinterested if he tried.

He eyed the blue sword at his side with not-so-hidden disdain.

"Why have you called for me? This Sesshomaru is busy." Sesshomaru tossed his silver hair over his shoulder. He was indeed busy. He had recaptured much of the land lost when his father fell, but much still needed to be rebuilt and stabilized. While the proximity barrier skill she bestowed upon him did help in the defense of his lands, Loki was far more helpful with his subuing and conquering land that was lost. He had a certain affinity for seeing humans and Demons bow to him, that was for certain.

He was to accompany Loki to the Distant Realm to address Odin for the first time as Lord. Another reason he didn't have time for his mother or her games.

He wasn't particularly looking forward to visiting Odin. He'd much rather visit another part of his own realm, or perhaps another Distant Realm with Loki rather than Loki's home.

"I'd like to bargain with you Sesshomaru. A barter." Sesshomaru's mother smiled thinly and Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles. He should have never trusted that she would ever do anything for him just to help him.

Everything she did had an ulterior motive.

"I gave you a special ability the last time you visited. You've managed to put it to good use, now in return I need you to do something for me." Sesshomaru's mother smirked and he instantly regretted
taking the ability and using it. His mother would reap a toll far greater than what she bestowed on him. He watched as impassively as he could as his elegant mother turned on her varnished heel and instantly the great door to the entrance of her kingdom opened slowly.

Out strutted a tall, crimson skinned Demon with jet black hair that had a life onto its own. He was clad in unusual garments, a wide collared violet cape and black, skin tight garments that left little of his brawny muscle definition to imagination. Some would certainly claim the Demon comely, however the upward shift of his thin lips rendered him far to smug for Sesshomaru's tastes.

That and his eyes caught his attention and put him on edge. Shrewd and sharp, Lightning zapped in his keen eyes. They were not gold like his, or amber like that whelp Inuyasha's. They glowed a bright, cold yellow.

"Charmed to finally meet your acquaintance, Lord Sesshomaru." Mephisto smiled, gleaming white fangs. Centuries of being friends with the God of Lies caught him to spot that obvious one. "I have heard much about you. I have served your mother, my Lady for centuries now." Mephisto greeted with a slight bow. Centuries? Why had he just met him now?

"…" Sesshomaru refrained to respond at all. Something about this lowly Demon irked him instantly. It was if he were vying to see what would gain him a favorable reaction, make a hole in his head, and wheedle his way in. He was certainly not to be trusted. The attitude about this Demon reminded him some of Loki: he definitely had an agenda of his own. Only, of course, Loki lied far better, and wore more appropriate clothes.

"Mephisto is my retainer, it would do you well to choose one for yourself. I'd like for him to accompany you on your upcoming trip to the Distant Realm. He wishes to meet Prince Loki." Sesshomaru's mother introduced and Sesshomaru's ears lowered.

"No." Sesshomaru's voice cut out and flames smoked out from around Mephisto's collar. So, he was a Fire Demon, how grating. Fire Demons typically thought they made the very planet rotate.

"No to appointing a retainer or for having Mephisto accompany you? You do not have to take any responsibility for him, I know how you loathe any remote sense of responsibility." Sesshomaru's mother primly sat on her throne, wearing a warning look Sesshomaru was all too familiar with.

"Both." Sesshomaru simply turned to leave. He would listen to his mother once she came to him with a reasonable barter. He didn't even ask for the damned technique and he was paying the price for it anyway. He cursed himself for being so weak the last time he met her.

'Loki would sooner me bring a Scorpion Demon in full bloodlust than this reckless, scheming Demon. He will certainly not abide his presence and I refuse to abide this Fire Demon and Loki bickering like two maidens. No good would come of it.' Sesshomaru took a few, sure strides away from one of the two members of living family left.

"You ungrateful, spoiled, short-sighted pup! You owe your mother a debt which you shall repay at my command!" His mother seethed, which she rarely did. It was most unusual for her to show such unbridled emotion in front of him and Sesshomaru wanted to grin in victory. Whatever his mother wanted from him had to be important.

Which was precisely why he was not vouching for this Fire Demon. Whatever his mother wanted from the Distant Realm this badly could not be good. It pleased Sesshomaru to have the power to thwart whatever small minded power-grab his mother thirsted for.

"I will do no such thing. This lowlife Fire Demon is beneath my station. I refuse to entertain such
classless beings, especially in such garments. Find another means to have your retainer meet Loki." Sesshomaru maintained his typical aloof façade. However, he heard the laughter of a deep baritone voice.

"Me beneath you? You're an abomination and an ignorant foo—" Mephisto started but was cut off by Sesshomaru's toxin whip tangled tight around his throat. Sesshomaru, with some difficulty, wound the whip down and brought the spurting, gurgling Fire Demon to his knees.

Him? An abomination? Never. He was perfection.

"Know your place, sniveling filth." Sesshomaru raised his chin and looked down his nose. Perhaps those bulky muscles of his were just for show. The toxin of his whip burned Mephisto's neck. In futility, Mephisto summoned embers of flame that licked up the whip to little effect.

"My lady should have—" Mephisto spat and clawed at his throat. "Never listened to her parents and coupled with your weak father. You are a mistake! An error! A poorly bred stain on my lady's reputation and legacy! Loki deserves a far better liaison!" Mephisto gripped the whip and shot a flare of fire at Sesshomaru who simply endured the desperate attack. How base. Did this Fire Demon desire to produce an heir with his mother? He wrinkled his nose despite himself, he would not abide another half sibling, even if this one would be a full Demon.

Sesshomaru's mother simply laughed, it tinkled like a bell.

"Oh Mephisto, come now, my dear son did not ask to be born now did he? You can hardly fault him for the circumstances behind his birth, no matter how ill-fated or undesirable." Sesshomaru's mother approached her son with an icy grace, but Sesshomaru didn't falter. Maybe he would have if his father hadn't already told him this information before. He was beyond caring now. It was his parents' own folly that led them into their coupling, not his.

"I am leaving." Sesshomaru had endured enough of his mother's games and this fool's ramblings. As far as he was concerned, tolerating his mother's antics was good enough. He released the whip and retracted it back as he turned again to walk away.

"Oh Sesshomaru, while you can't be blamed for coming into this world, I can blame you for making my role as mother so difficult. Do you know what you've had to make me do? You're still so... lackluster and too obstinate to see just how. I suppose you've given me no choice, I wanted this process to be easier on you, but...oh well." Sesshomaru's mother flicked her wrist and Sesshomaru paused.

Just then in front of him, a window of clear, nebulous space opened up and in it he saw a swirling, dark emptiness. He had seen this before and was prepared. He would not be ensnared again by his mother's tricks.

Tenseiga pulsed in fear.

"You have to face your destiny, time to pay the price. Astral Lagoon." A rush of space rushed out before he knew it he was swallowed by it. His lungs clamped, his eyes bulged and dried out. He had no authority over his body, his neural system seized into complete arrest. One by one, his organs drained of blood, his heart stilled.

She wouldn't actually try to kill him over this, would she?

Tenseiga thrummed.

Twitching, the only thing his body could do was send out the very distress signal his damned
mother taught him, his proximity barrier.

His eyes bled, his heart faltered and before he knew it he collapsed on his belly, in his lands. How inexcusable. He couldn't move, he couldn't scrap together a coherent thought. He gasped at air he couldn't fully inhale and thoughts he couldn't fully form.

"—you aloof, fuzzy dog? Get up!" Sesshomaru heaved blood onto the dirt, his talons had balled up into his palm and blood ran down his arms, slick and free. His eyes, also had scarlet running over his checks and jaw. He had been bleeding from under his fingernails, mouth, ears, eyes and obviously, his nose. The metallic stench of his own blood in his nose almost made him sneeze. He blinked rapidly couldn't see or feel anything. His nerves jolted and clung together, too hyper alert for any reaction.

How much blood had he lost?

"The Nines, Sho, can you hear me?" Loki? Was that Loki? He would never be able to forgive himself if it was Loki who found him like this. He was the only one who he couldn't bring himself to automatically slay for seeing him such a submissive, weak, and vulnerable state. No. He could not afford to show any weakness as Lord of the Western lands.

He rose up to his knees. It would be the last time he would trust his mother with any gift.

"Sesshomaru, tell who did this to you. I will find them... we will find them. I'll tie them up by their children's entrails and you can feed them their testicles, or ovaries if female. We haven't done something like that in ages." In an instant Sesshomaru had Loki by the throat, claws drawing blood.

His fangs extended long and carnivorous, his eyes red and markings ran jagged. Yet, despite how Sesshomaru knew how menacing he must appear, a Demon that in this realm, and Loki's own would fear, Loki showed none. Sesshomaru shook, his nerves jingling high on adrenaline and his youki spiked out in erratic splashes. Loki didn't attempt to deflect or neutralize them.

"SILENCE." Sesshomaru shouted, a rarity. "If you ever speak of this moment, to me or to anyone I will..." and for once he couldn't voice an appropriate threat. Killing Loki's brother would be overmuch and that would be something his deceitful mother would do. Simply threatening harm to Loki would lack any real true follow through.

They had long past the time where they trusted each other with not killing the other over petty matters.

Loki didn't say a word and Sesshomaru released him, leaving a bloody handprint on his neck that was more his own blood than Loki's. He willed himself to calm, taking three deep breaths and Tenseiga at his hip hummed.

"Tenseiga..." Loki trailed off as well into silence, and Sesshomaru knew their silences communicated just as much as their words did. Sesshomaru noted his clothing was in disrepair and slick in his own blood. He would have to change his garments before going to the Distant Realm.

"I'm in Asgard for three days and I return to find out you have been missing for three Midgardian weeks." Loki informed calmly, but Sesshomaru could see magic coiling around his fingers like snakes. Three weeks? His mother would pay for this. "A Fire Demon sought me out, seeking to replace you as an envoy for the Demons. I almost do think he was attempting to seduce me...I sent him packing. An odd coincidence he was to find me when you were missing." Loki's voice almost sounded humorous but his mouth was taut and severe. That Fire Demon tried to seduce Loki and
replace him as Envoy? Like that could ever work.

"A terrible fool, that Mephisto. I dare say, he knew much about me though, he thought he could outright lie to me....No matter. Go wash yourself, I will inform Allfather of your belated arrival." Loki rambled, and Sesshomaru knew that Loki had his suspicions on who did this to him. Loki and he had a very strict agreement to not intervene in the familiar affairs of the other unless asked. Sesshomaru didn't agree or disagree with Loki's command, he just simply turned his head towards his palace.

"Sho, wherever you were, my magic could not reach you." Loki bit out rigid as a Tree Demon. Sesshomaru whipped around suddenly, eyes wide. Loki did not just sound apologetic!

"I am not yours to reach whenever you wish, Loki." Sesshomaru retorted and Loki relaxed, smiling wildly. He did not just reassure Loki that he didn't care if he didn't find him! Loki and he were growing too close indeed.

"It looks too small to be a portal, but I won't know until I can study it in a lab, and I'm pretty sure I'm banned from Tony's for life." Banner scratched the back of his head.

"It's been looked into. The few star patterns that are visible are nothing like that you can see from this hemisphere. Nothing in this galaxy matches it. It appears the enemy is unlocking a new way to our doorstep." Fury turned to Sesshomaru pointedly and Sesshomaru's uninjured ear rose.

"…" Sesshomaru said nothing, but it spoke volumes.

"Do you know what it is? You do, don't you?" Banner asked and Sesshomaru's gaze turned glacial. As if he would tell these humans anything about this Astral Plane. It would do them no good to know of its existence. He also couldn't tell them what he didn't know himself. He hadn't exactly meant to summon the window, Bakusaiga simply sang to him, and it was the only thing he could think of to not transform.

"It is none of your concern." Sesshomaru's voice turned stony and his ears lowered. He slowly began to heal his ear as his youki finally began to return to him. He looked to Fury, expecting a challenge.

"I have a feeling we will find out soon whether it's currently our concern or not. I will honor my word. I gave you my intel, I never said you had to give me any of yours." Fury strengthened his stance and Sesshomaru relaxed. That answer appeased him.

"Indeed." Sesshomaru nodded, he would not accept this…olive branch of Fury's outright, but he would continue to spare his life. He had smelled the curiosity wafting off the humans, but Fury indeed restrained himself.

"I'm a scientist…curiosity comes the territory." Banner almost sounded embarrassed and Sesshomaru had a feeling that Stark would be interested in such a portal as well. It twisted his gut to know that Stark certainly wanted nothing more to do with him except to amuse him with 'tricks' like these. He would insure that he would make arrangements to stay outside of Stark's fortress.

Just because Stark capitulated to Fury's terms did not mean that Stark wanted him in the tower. He had born witness to, and been subjected to tense invitations from other Lords, and even Odin himself, and knew when the invitation was a formality only. This was one of those terms.
Sesshomaru, while not exactly sure how, managed to be on the receiving end of one from the one he never wanted to receive one from.

"I have places to be, but I'll be in touch." Fury ended the conversation. "Oh, and just a suggestion, you may want to put on the sweatshirt in the bag. You aren't exactly undercover material and judging by the flowers being left on the barricades and fences blocking Stark tower, 'humans' know what you look like." Fury added and Banner took out a red hooded sweatshirt from the bag. Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes at Fury and determined the human was no longer worth any of his energy and allowed him to retreat.

He did, however, make the mental note that Rin liked flowers and that they had been hard to find in this metropolis. He had little idea why humans were leaving flowers for him, but if Rin would enjoy them, he would entreat to show them to her.

"Your dislocated shoulder is only gonna get more inflamed." Banner prompted and Sesshomaru sighed through his nose. "It's hard putting a shoulder back into place, and I owe you from giving Loki and I an out from the tower with your sword. Let me help reset it." Banner offered coming closer and inspecting the shoulder. "Your collarbone looks broken too. Geez, how did that happen?" Banner winced for Sesshomaru as he ran his hand over the swollen joint.

"Storm God interfered with my defense of Stark's sovereignty. Do as you wish, Banner…" Sesshomaru was about to respond that he would fetch his own clothes, but from across the way his sensitive hearing a particularly familiar voice shouting out mid-rut.

Loki and Barton finally coupled. He allowed himself a small smirk, he may just inform Polly of this when he collected Rin and Jaken from her Ice Cream Store.

"That would do it…Wait is Thor…" Banner started then stammered and he sighed harshly again through his nose.

"He lives, Banner." Sesshomaru, knowing what Banner would say next about his shoulder, he shredded off the already ruined shirt.

"That's reassuring. I think." Banner winced himself when he saw the black and purple bruise that puddled across his whole shoulder to his neckline.

"Alright on three, one, two…" on two, not three, Banner wrenched the shoulder back into place. Sesshomaru, taken the slightest bit off guard stiffened slightly and his pupils slimed thin.

"Banner." Sesshomaru growled out, flexing his wrist, ignoring the grinding of his broken clavicle. Banner moved to his back, he assumed to examine the exit wound of the bullet.

"It works better when you aren't expecting it. You better clean this out, I know you're… well, you, but this could still get infected. I can clean it for you." Banner offered and Sesshomaru quirked a delicate eyebrow and debated for a moment.

"Fine, Banner." Sesshomaru debated if he was truly losing his sanity allowing Banner to clean his wound but it would serve as a good test to see if he could adequately heal Rin if such a need arose.

"I haven't seen wounds like these since I worked near the Pakistan-India boarder. You said you could regenerate limbs?" Banner, fascinated, examined the ragged, cratered wound which should on any human be profusely bleeding, or causing a terrible amount of pain.

"This Sesshomaru is unparalleled in his control of his abilities. There is little I cannot do." Sesshomaru refused to wince this time as what he had to assume was anti-infectant stung his
wound.

"And so modest too. You and Tony both." Banner swabbed the sluggishly healing wound and Sesshomaru's ears lowered and he cracked his knuckles. Stark and him together in a sentence.

"Ok I'm going to put on a bandage...then you're good to go back, I guess." Banner patted on the bandage and an odd feeling tingled in Sesshomaru's mind. It seemed that Banner genuinely cared about his welfare despite knowing his healing abilities. He was either daft or sentimental, but nonetheless he secretly appreciated the help.

Not that he would ever admit that.

"I need to collect Rin and Jaken." Sesshomaru informed unnecessarily and bent down to retrieve the clothes from the bag Fury provided. Inside was a white t-shirt which had to be some sort of attempt at humor since it had a stylized Mjolnir emblazoned on it. Maybe he should have at least collected some fingers from the human.

"Wow, Loki can wear his Hulk shirt and you can wear thi—" Banner started and stopped when Sesshomaru swiped at him half-heartedly with his talons, which Banner easily avoided.

"I think I'll hold onto it." Banner continued and instead of arguing Sesshomaru just zipped up the red hooded sweatshirt. It didn't fit well, it was far too bulky and his hair stuck out the bottom hem. Also, the fabric of the hood felt strange against his ears. His ears twitched and poked the fabric out.

At the bottom of the bag was a sunglasses case. He picked it up and opened it to reveal his preferred his aviator sunglasses. His eyes gleamed in approval and he slipped them on his head, ears up, moving the hood around.

"I think that's Fury's way of saying 'thank you'. Do know where Loki is? He probably needs someone to look into his wounds." Banner chuckled and Sesshomaru's ears poked the fabric again. If Banner wished to locate Loki to assist his healing, he must care for him.

"Loki and Barton are currently coupling in my quarters; I wouldn't disturb them." Sesshomaru stated blandly, attempting to tuck his long, tangled hair into the baggy garment. He ignored Banner's wide, bulging eyes.

"Great. Sounds like Loki's healed enough for the both of you. Now I just need some bleach to wash my eyes with. Maybe the isopropyl alcohol will work?" Banner grimaced as if he ate something rancid.

Ping.

The fading proximity barrier alerted him. It was faint, and if he didn't already know the general vicinity that Jaken and Rin were in he would have some trouble locating them.

Jaken was in peril, which meant Rin was in peril. He eyed Banner, if Rin was injured he would need a healer he could trust.

In an instant, Sesshomaru's pelt coiled around Banner and Sesshomaru with every ounce of agility a Demon Lord like him possessed, he bounded out of the decimated room. With Banner in tow, he flipped from tower to tower as a red and white streak.

His ears twitched and strained, trying to sift and filter through the loud, clamoring noises in the air. His hearing had woefully decreased in efficiency without the devices, but he couldn't think about that now.
He must to get to Rin and Jaken.

He could vaguely hear Banner's muffled voice but he paid it no mind as he landed finally outside the alley near the safe location he designated for Jaken.

Bakusaiga hissed and Tenseiga pulsed in response to the scene.

Inside the squalid alley Jaken scrambled for the staff held by Lady Potts, who Sesshomaru honestly forgot had left to locate Rin and Jaken. She and Jaken stood in front of Rin with their hands out wide. In front of Sesshomaru, with his back facing towards him was a human with a firearm of some kind. Bandit.

He must have cornered them here before they reached their destination.

"There's no way this is all the money you have! And just what kind of fancy phone is this? Slide the jewelry over too ya broad." The bandit in front of Sesshomaru sounded young. He was too dressed in a hooded sweatshirt.

"How old are you? Fourteen? Put down the gun before you hurt someone or yourself. In fact, if you give it to me, I'll forget this whole thing ever happened because I could really use less bravado today." Lady Potts put her hands on her hips, apparently not afraid of the bandit. Sesshomaru uncoiled the pelt from Banner, who unhappily staggered, skin a shade green.

Sesshomaru watched from the street, if he acquiesced and gave into Lady Potts reasonable command he would allow him to walk away, somewhat unscathed.

"Shut up you bitch! Hand over the stuff, including that creepy cane, or I'm gonna put you in the ground and the little girl too." Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed and he strode into the alley with a quick, fluid movement. The bandit whipped around and he appeared to be Kohaku's age for a human. Old enough to know the consequences of his actions.

Those who threatened Rin died. That simple.

"I told you! You are in big trouble now! My Lord is here and he isn't happy!" Rin sounded from behind Jaken, waving her bone. Jaken bounced in relief and Sesshomaru's talons grew and glowed a venomous green.

Even though the hood was still placed on his head the bandit's eyes widened in recognition of the figure in front of him. Perhaps Fury had been right, even the scum of this realm realized who he was easily.

With a crack of a whip he wound his signature whip around the firearm, melting half of it into slag which the bandit dropped instantly.

"Fucking shit Mr Nirvan—" The bandit was silenced with a fist of his talons through his gut. A wet, guttural cry oozed from his mouth. The firearm clattered harmlessly to the ground and Sesshomaru made sure to pump toxin into his blood stream to kill him quickly.

The bandit's body crumpled to the ground amidst the screams and protests of Lady Potts and Banner. Lady Potts dropped the staff of two heads which Jaken quickly reclaimed.

Sesshomaru flicked the gore from his talons; he hated smelling like humans. He heard Banner run up from behind him and he knelt down to the bleeding corpse.

"That's what you get when you mess with us, you brainless bandit!" Jaken exclaimed and
Sesshomaru locked eyes with Lady Potts who had turned white as an Ice Demon. Odd.

"He doesn't have a pulse. There isn't anything I can do for him." Banner rose, shaken, covered in the bandit's blood. Sesshomaru fought the urge to roll his eyes. Of course, he didn't have a pulse. Where his gut should be, there was a substantially large hole. Even Inuyasha would have a hard time surviving such a blow.

"Oh god. Oh god. That didn't just happen. You didn't just kill a kid in an alley. I… I need to call 911. I need my phone, he has mine. What made…you can't just do that!" Lady Potts protested in a panic and her hand trembled to her cellphone. 911? What was that?

"But he was a bandit Lady Potts. Bandits are terrible! They killed my family…." Rin trailed off, clearly confused as was he. He had threatened them, and he took appropriate action.

"Rin, I am so sorry. I know you grew up in a different time, but you just can't kill kids because they want your phone, or money. That's what the police, and jail and the justice system is for. Not… claws and poison and… God we trusted you! How could you?" Lady Pott's voice turned shrill as she pointed to Sesshomaru whose eyebrows rose.

Trust? Trusted him to not harm humans? When did he make that declaration? He did recount he refused to eat any of the plump humans from this time…

Tenseiga cried from his side. He wanted to save this morally deficient human but refused Kagura? For what reason?

"Yeah, we could have definitely done without this today. Smooth." Banner, too, paled, and Sesshomaru silently assessed the situation. He did still owe Lady Potts for his outfit, and his fine garment and this vagabond's life weighed about equivalent in his mind.

"Banner, Jaken, leave and take Rin to see the flowers. I will repay my debt to Lady Potts here." Sesshomaru evenly, and placidly stated and Tenseiga thrummed.

Pause.

"Lord Sesshomaru you couldn't possibly be serious about using Ten—" Sesshomaru cut Jaken a look that could cleave through stone and Jaken froze.

"Let's go Banner I want to see the flowers! Don't worry, Lord Sesshomaru is going to fix everything, and I'm going to make a flower crown for you!" Rin beamed a smile that could have warmed any heart and Banner faulted.

"Oh. Okay…." Banner cut a hesitant glance to Lady Potts who just put her head in her left hand and shooed him off with her right.

The trio left and Sesshomaru walked purposefully towards the cooling body of the bandit.

"I don't know what you mean by repaying a debt but I'm certain there is no way you can fix this. I'm going to call 911, and try to figure out how not to have you in handcuffs in full view of the lower east side." Lady Potts fished her phone out of the satchel of the bandit. She finally retrieved it only to drop it as it was coated in congealing blood.

Sesshomaru unsheathed Tenseiga. He glowed a faint blue and he immediately saw the spirits of the underworld manifest, collecting the bandit's soul.

'She said she trusted me. Trust. If these humans trust me to be what they need me to be, I shall
require the same in return.' Sesshomaru's throat closed as he recalled Loki's bold laughter that if humans of this time were to discover Tenseiga's true ability they would hunt him down for it.

Against a world of them, against Fury and his helicarriers, Rogers and Romanoff's prowess, Banner and his true form, Barton and his purification magic, Thor and Mjolnir… Stark and his ingenuity and weapons.

He could lose that battle.

No, if executed properly, and Loki remained neutral, he would lose that battle if the invading forces arrived in tandem.

"You, what you think hacking him into bits like a serial killer is helping me? That's a whole other crime!" Sesshomaru ignored Lady Potts as she stormed towards him. With a flourish of his right wrist he cut down the underworld spirits and their small cries filled the air. Sesshomaru sheathed Tenseiga with an equally impressive flip and waited.

The gaping, venom oozing wound instantly had knit itself closed and the bandit groaned and grunted. Slowly, he pushed himself to his hands and knees, blood still staining his garment.

With a small pulse of youki, he vaporized the viscous blood cleaning the whole area.

"Oh. Holy Moses. Did you… did that just..." Lady Potts trailed off, Sesshomaru smelled anxiety and shock waft from her.

"Rise bandit." Sesshomaru commanded and the bandit did, and his knees shook in his soiled pants. Eyes wide with tears streaming down his dirty face he sobbed.

"State your name for Lady Potts." Sesshomaru left no room for negotiation.

"Lou—Louis." He stammered and Sesshomaru allowed it. He narrowed his eyes down at the boy, his tan skin was mottled with bruises and his white teeth clattered. He took in a deep breath through his nose, memorizing the bandit's pungent scent.

"You owe Lady Potts a life debt. Lady Potts, would you like to collect this life debt now?" Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and he heard the boy swallow as he nodded.

"What?! I'm not accepting a life debt, that sounds like slavery or at least incredibly morally deficient…Though I'm sure you mean well, Sesshomaru. No, I'm fine, and please just call me Pepper." Lady Potts rambled. He would not call her a food item. He doubted she really understood what he meant by 'life debt', but she did not have to accept it.

"Leave. Do not interfere with this Sesshomaru or those under his protection again." Sesshomaru evenly hissed and the boy, this time, didn't hesitate at all as he sprinted off into the street.

Pause.

"That video. The first one, of you and Loki on the roof. It's true about the sword. You can bring people back to life! That's incredible…this is a miracle. Wait." Lady Potts' eyes narrowed in comprehension. She was no fool of a woman. She fully comprehended the gravity of wielding such a power.

"I entrust to you this secret. As you are aware, you are the only being in this time aside Rin and Jaken who know of Tenseiga's true abilities." Sesshomaru took a step forward squaring up to the
human woman, still white knuckling her purse. She locked eyes with his. Surely, she understood that with one message she could have him hunted.

"The doctor visit... you brought Rin back to life didn't you?" Lady Potts pursed her lips and Sesshomaru fought a look of surprise. Of all the realizations she could have voiced, she thought of Rin's healer visit. Odd woman. Sesshomaru inclined his head as a nod.

"Listen, I understand you are trusting me with this. Just give me a moment, I didn't expect you to literally fix this... I thought you'd, I don't know, just clean up or make an excuse or something." Lady Potts scrunched her nose deep in thought. She nodded thinking to herself.

"I have repaid your debt of the clothing. I am going to go collect Rin and Jaken." Sesshomaru announced. Lady Potts rolled her blue eyes.

"Ok, what? Those... I can't. I can't even go into how those two things aren't equivalent with you right now. Phew. Ok, so, I know SHIELD can't find out, they'd try to steal it, or imprison you, or something out of a Jason Bourne movie. You should tell Tony, maybe when the time is better. He'd want to know that you did this. He'd appreciate it." Lady Potts collected herself and retrieved her phone from the ground. Sesshomaru studied her handling it, and she sighed in dismay when it remained ruined despite him dissipating the blood away.

Sesshomaru didn't say anything. He sincerely doubted Stark would appreciate slaying a human in front of Lady Potts, no matter how he resolved the issue. It was something certainly no normal humans did, and Stark wanted normal. Together they left the alley, walking together in an unfamiliar, strained silence.

"Oh, please no more killing humans, ok?" Lady Potts pointed a finger his way and he didn't dignify it with a response, except his ears twitching and poking the hood of his sweatshirt.

They came upon the flowers soon enough, fenced and walled off sections of street had been decorated with flowers, various signs, some he had trouble reading, and of course, swarms and swarms of humans. His ears rang and shrank against the sides of his head.

"Well, be careful what you wish for...." Lady Potts started and immediately three figures found them, most likely Jaken sensed his youki. Many humans had their cellphones out, some had other devices and candles. He wanted to leave soon, his shoulder and his ears hurt and he didn't really understand what this was about.

'In my time, when I would defeat a Demon near a human village, or a human scourge, the other humans would accuse me of similar nefarious acts, not mourn me.' Sesshomaru remembered a time a group of monks once tried to cross him and unsuccessfully attempted to convince Rin he was evil.

Rin had indeed made Banner a flower crown, along with Jaken.

"Lord Sesshomaru! There are so many flowers and pictures and music! I even saw a few of Uncle Loki! It looks like a party, but everyone is sad or angry. Can we stay?" Rin bounced enthusiastically, Banner now held her bag of her belongings.

"No Rin, we are leaving now." Sesshomaru paused, through the muddled noises he heard a song, a song he knew well: Serve the Servants by Nirvana.

'If she floats, then she is not, a witch like we had thought.  
A down payment on another one, at Salem's Lot.'
"Oddly appropriate song." Banner heard it too. "I thought Fury was exaggerating the turn out but people here really care. How...did the um, kid situation go?" Banner adjusted his flower crown.

"He lives." Sesshomaru informed. All of this made him want to just go home. Back to his lands where he had much to do, and didn't have to answer to any humans or deal with any undue complications. Banner was about to respond with a furrowed brow when Rin beat him to it.

"So, you care about Lord Sesshomaru along with Jaken and I too, Banner?!" Rin piped up, picking up Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow at Rin's question. Banner toyed with his flower crown.

"Uhh, yeah, sure Rin. I mean, it looks like Loki's strategy succeeded. Just look at all this stuff!" Banner assessed, looking pointedly at Lady Potts as if anticipating a rebuttal.

"I am, again, cleaning up someone's mess. We are arranging a private press briefing off site at SHIELD headquarters to confirm they both are fine." Lady Potts informed and Sesshomaru's eyes widened. He caught someone on the edge of the crowd walking away. She shuffled away slumping her shoulders with crested dark blue hair, and her head down. Polly.

"Why are you here?" Sesshomaru sped in front of her, his question more of a demand as she jumped back, face surprised, her usual pristine facial paint now smudged on her eyes and lips.

"Mr...Mysterious! you're alive?! Everyone thin-" Polly slapped a hand over her mouth as she realized her yelling attracted attention. "Everyone on Reddit thinks you're dead and that SHIELD is covering it up! I snuck in to the press conference and I saw Loki and you get shot, and I thought you were too! Omg. Thank god you're ok!" Polly threw her thin arms around him and embraced him. Sesshomaru stiffened. This was unexpected.

"This Sesshomaru will not die here. Remove yourself from my person at once." Sesshomaru reassured, arms out, eyes wide at the blue head buried in his chest. Humans in this time are so peculiar!

"Polly! We brought our friends chocolate swirl, and Vanilla! Lord Sesshomaru shot himself so everyone would like Uncle Loki!" Rin skipped up to Polly, with Banner and Lady Potts following close behind her and Jaken. Polly straightened out of her hug, looking at him, then Banner, then Lady Potts then Rin. Her face filtered through an assortment of emotions before landing on anger.

"You, Mr. Mysterious, have a lot of explaining to do. Like how you can destroy spaceships, and I totally saw your vid of you in Central Park owning those aliens. Killer. C'mon let's get out of here before someone sees you or something. We can go back to the shop." Polly hit Sesshomaru in the chest and he suppressed a growl. Polly turned to Banner looking at him like one would a hard strategy problem.

"Ok well, this has been fine and all but I am going back to check on Tony. I would...I would give him time before coming back. It's nice meeting you, Polly..." Lady Potts reached out her hand and Polly, with her many rings, shook it.

"Polly Tanaka. It's awesome to meet you, CEO of Stark Industries and everything. If you ever want free ice cream, or tattoos let me know, Mr. Mysterious has my number, my cards are at the shop." Polly ran her fingers under her eyes in an attempt to remove her smudged make up.

"I'll keep it in mind, the ice cream, not the tattoo." Lady Potts' lips curled up in a strained smile as she left.
"Let's go." Polly kept her voice low as she filtered through the crowd around them. Sesshomaru followed her blue crested figure as she ducked and weaved, and ducked through a building.

"Shortcut. It's where I used to protest for Occupy Wall Street." Polly waved them on through 60 Wall Street, an indoor park, with white columns, stone sculptures and trees. Humans milled about, but most seemed to be intent on getting to their own destinations.

"You protested?" Banner asked in a weak attempt at conversation.

"Duh. Corporations own America and greed will be our country's downfall." Polly stated seriously and Sesshomaru had little idea what she was referring to. Humans themselves, not The Mad Titan, would likely be this time's downfall.

Eventually they made it back to the ice cream shop, the safe point Sesshomaru instructed Jaken to take Rin to. Polly turned on the lights and he took his typical seat, hood finally falling off.

'Why was Polly even there? Could it be these humans, because I shot down that vessel, laud me as some sort of protector of this realm? Did they all mourn or express fear in my wounding?' Sesshomaru looked at Rin, Jaken, and Banner. Polly had just gone through a door and up some stairs only to come back down with some sort of fragrant food.

"Leftovers! Hope you guys like rice and pork cutlets! I can obviously scoop some ice cream for dessert. I don't know if you eat human food, Mr. Mysterious but I'm sure I can find something for the new protector of NYC." Sesshoumaru half listened as Polly put down the bag and took out her phone from her pocket, putting it on the table. He could hear Rin's, Jaken's and Banner's empty stomachs rumble. He frowned slightly, he should have had insured Rin was adequately fed before the tactic this morning.

Sesshomaru's eyes widened as really absorbed what Polly had said.

Protector!

It was what he had become to the humans, unintentionally. It is why Lady Potts became so distressed, they trusted him to protect the humans, not kill them, and every action he had taken up until that point had proven her true.

He could have let Banner go mad, at any occurrence, the first, second, or third before he trained him. He could have ignored the baiting Chitauri and let them ravage the humans. He could have shot the vessel down over the city rather than in the harbor. He could have used Bakusaiga on Fury when Rin and Jaken were safely out of the tower, potentially harming everyone in the room, save Banner and Loki.

'If I had done any one of those things it would have dismantled their entire goal of defending this realm. I held back to protect these humans. When did this occur? When did assisting Loki in his revenge coincide with protecting this realm and all its inhabitants, and not just the ones he values? When did their livelihood matter as much my conquest? Why did I feel so strongly to defend Stark's sovereignty of his tower?' Sesshomaru focused at a point on the wall, face revealing nothing of his pensive nature.

'If this is the case, why did Stark take so negatively to Loki's tactic? I had even worked with his team, like he harped on the previous day.' Despite his heightened hearing, Sesshomaru retreated farther into his own thoughts.

"So, welcome to my family's shop, we live above it. I'm Polly Tanaka, ice cream scooper by
morning, tattoo apprentice by afternoon. You're the Hulk right? Nice job in central park by the way!" She put out her black, skull marked hand for a handshake, Banner just looked shell-shocked, but grabbed her hand and the card. Polly's eyes lit up.

"Yeah, that's me, and uh, thanks I try." Banner stammered with an awkward grin. Sesshomaru didn't understand how such a fearsome fighter could play so humble.

"An Avenger just shook my hand! If you ever want any ink here's my card." Polly's eyes went wide under her smeared grey eyepaint as Banner took the card.

"Yeah, thanks you can call me Bruce. I think I'm set on body modifications, I tried one on myself a while back, didn't work out so well. It's good to meet the music bartering ice cream vendor we've heard so much about." Polly looked to Sesshomaru in disbelief. Sesshomaru simply looked back at her.

"I can't believe you're telling me the other people in 'The Sundae' are the Avengers! And they know about me? Oh, this so badass. So, that must mean Lime Sherbet is Loki?!!" Polly's metal ringed eyebrows shot up and her smudged black lips dropped. Sesshomaru nodded once and Polly threw her ringed hands in the air in shock.

"Yup! My Lord and Uncle Loki are friends! Uncle Loki is ok too!" Rin announced, unwrapping her chopsticks and eyeing Jaken's piece of meat.

"Wow, so your crazy ass devised a plot to shoot yourselves? You're so not right in the head. I was right, you were in some deep shit. You could have told me." Polly frowned pointing a finger at the Demon Lord.

"Loki and Romanoff," Polly looked at him expectantly. "Strawberry, included only those necessary." Sesshomaru explained, and Polly sighed. Sesshomaru rolled his broken clavicle, hearing it grind. He willed his youki to mend the bone quicker since Tenseiga remained obstinate.

Polly reached for her phone, glaring at Sesshomaru while she did so before she raised a finger.

"Waiiiit. So. If Lime Sherbet is Loki, then is this guy…" She thumbed her phone "Mint Chocolate Chip? Is he Hawkeye? He looks undercover." She held out her phone to Rin, showing photos of them all sitting on the stage. Loki and he stood at the podium, staring out at the crowd like the Lord and Prince their fathers had raised them to be. He noted in the photographs Barton had his eyes on Loki the whole time, and Stark on himself.

"Yup! Uncle Loki likes him a lot! Even Romanoff thinks so!" Rin piped up, eating some of the kimchi and Banner's eyes bulged out of his head. Jaken squirmed.

"They are currently coupling in my former quarters." Sesshomaru informed neutrally and Banner choked on his drink.

"That improper God did not even ask your permission, Lord Sesshomaru? Hmph! Good riddance we aren't staying in that fortress any longer!" Sesshomaru was somewhat inclined to agree but he would not voice that opinion to Jaken since it was not like he usually slept in a bed.

"Way to go Mr Mysterious! Or should I say Mr Matchmaker!?" Polly poked her red star marked elbow into his ribs and Banner began to recover.

"Wait, you tried to hook them up? Loki and Clint?" Banner incredulously asked.

"...I may have helped put set into motion a series of events." Sesshomaru simply said and Rin gave
him a wide smile. Banner just put his head in his hands.

"So…gotta ask then. Who is Chocolate? I thought it'd be Brucey here since he was the first to get to you, but if not then it has to be one of these two." Polly smirked, eyes alight, she fiddled with her black lace shirt, her metal ringed lip bent up in an anticipatory grin, showing him her phone which showed Thor and Stark.

"As I was getting carried away by the crowd, I saw those two go completely batshit. Didn't snap a pic but I'm sure they're on imgur or Instagram or something." Polly opened a new screen on her phone and Sesshomaru's eyes went wide.

"I'd never couple with the Storm God." Sesshomaru's weak youki spiked in alarm it was considered a possibility. His eyes hardened as Banner across from him chuckled and Rin rocked from side to side happily.

"Aha! So, you do admit it! You and Chocolate! He must be Tony Stark then. Man, he is totally nuts about you then. Look this photo someone put on Instagram." Polly showed him a photo of Stark, thrown to the stage by Rogers (smart of the Captain) eyes wild, screaming something, He was reaching for him. Sesshomaru eyed himself on the stage, face up. He did indeed look seriously wounded.

Could Stark have actually had been concerned about him beyond his role as protector?

"He stated he wanted a casual relation only. He also, unwisely, views me as beneath his station." He heard himself say unnecessarily, voice somewhat distant, looking at the photo, then remembering how Stark looked when he entered the room, seeing him sitting up, extracting the poison bullet.

He looked stricken, as if he himself had been poisoned.

"This guy looks down on you? Pffft, yeah right. Have you looked in a mirror, or seen youtube? I can't say I know Tony Stark, like personally, and I get he is some super genius billionaire guy, but no way could he look down you. Look at his reaction here, the guy totally digs you. Like this is above casual status. Look at this one photo, I think he literally kicked Captain America like twice. Captain America, who by the way, has to be Butter Pecan." Polly thumbed through numerous photos of different angles, quality and distance. Sesshomaru simply gazed neutrally.

"Usually I would stay out of stuff like this, but maybe you should talk to Tony. He is definitely fixated on you. I haven't seen him act this way with anyone else." Banner said in between bites and Sesshomaru hummed. He could get some clarification on some matters, and he would like his yukata and his hakamas back.

"Stark was just worried about you, Lord Sesshomaru!" Rin informed and Polly laughed, cheering to herself before becoming serious.

"...So, the aliens are coming back. Are they coming to New York again?" Polly asked, this time tone serious. Sesshomaru regarded her, sensing her fear. She need not worry, he would not fail.

"Doubtful. They sought Loki and I, not this metropolis. This is an economic metropolis of little militaristic value, they are likely to have other targets." Sesshomaru explained without any emotion, calculating in his mind the best places to conduct a trap. The one large naval base would work well.

"Well, don't get yourself shot to shit anymore or kidnapped ok Mr. Mysterious? Or I guess Mr.
Nirvana now. And look out for Lime Sherbet too, he seems decent enough. I think we all know how it feels to be forced to do something you don't want to do." She shot a knowing glance at Banner who merely pulled his lips back in a thin smile. It pleased Sesshomaru that Polly did not show disdain for Loki. She even showed approval. Polly scooped out ice cream for Rin, Jaken, and Banner.

"I'm gonna head back and try to smooth things over with Tony. I think after today I'm probably on some sort of 'Tony Stark hit list'. You coming with me?" Banner stood and Sesshomaru shook his head.

"No. This Sesshomaru is no fool. While he did acquiesce in allowing us to stay in his fortress to Fury, I know when an invitation is forced." Sesshomaru straightened, fighting a deep twisting in his lungs that somehow rivaled the pain in his shoulder.

"I told you Lord Sesshomaru! These humans are nothing but trouble. We don't need them!" Jaken announced and Sesshomaru cut him with an icy gaze.

"Jaken, take Rin back to the tower. Do try to not get ambushed by bandits this time." Sesshomaru ordered and Jaken deflated. He knew better than to argue.

"So, you're avoiding him cuz ya pissed him off? That's real helpful." Polly supplied and Sesshomaru glared her way. What exactly was he supposed to do instead? She began to scoop out three ice cream cones and the urgency to spar again sparked in his mind.

"I need to replenish the proximity barrier and train." Sesshomaru's stomach sank with an emotion he could only identify as unease.

'Stark had called me a squatter before, even if in jest, he must believe it true. I am an outsider in his life, and now no longer wants me there. It is unfortunate I have the opposite desire for him.' His ears dipped and he willed right ear to finally heal.

"Ok Lord Sesshomaru. I'll continue to train with Romanoff too!" Rin set her facial features and nodded. It wasn't that Sesshomaru didn't want Rin by him, it was that he had to figure out his tumultuous emotions and needed to be alone to do so. Yet, with the bandit today, he now knew that the tower was the safest place for Rin and Jaken.

"Fine by me, I'll walk them back, and if you ever wrap me up in that fur thing again and slingshot me around the city, my other form will make that bruise on your shoulder look like a blush." Banner jokingly threatened and while his true form certainly could certainly wreak havoc, he doubted he would be in a position to sustain such damage from it.

"Your threats ring hollow, Banner." Sesshomaru almost smirked as they left the ice cream shop, Rin with two cones, one a rainbow swirl of some sort, the other chocolate. Jaken had a rainbowed one as well.

Polly ran up and put a small, stretchy, bright red, fabric ring in his hand.

"Hair tie. See you Mr. Mysterious. Stay in one piece and kiss and make-up with Chocolate alright?!" Polly called out and Sesshomaru's ears shot straight up, tenting the hood of his hood.

"She's…interesting. Can she be trusted?" Banner finally inserted his opinion. Sesshomaru stretched the fabric tie.

"Yes." Sesshomaru bit out, perhaps too forcefully and quickly.
"Lord Sesshomaru, do we have to go back to that wretched tower?!” Jaken pleaded and Sesshomaru sighed through his nose.

"Do not whine to me, Jaken." Sesshomaru bit out, suddenly weary. His ears rang, his shoulder hurt, and he just wanted to be alone.

"Alright, I'll see you. C'mon guys." Banner must have sensed his unease as he led them down the street that danced in blue and red flashing lights, news vans and crowds. He could hear Jaken's grumbling and Rin's humming along the way.

Sesshomaru wasted no time taking to the air, pulling the string of his hooded sweatshirt tight to avoid it flying back.

He made a sharp turn, rebounding off a skyscraper, and headed to his preferred one for summoning his proximity barrier.

He sat for a while, letting the voiceless wind whip around him until he finally decided to tug his tangled hair into the elastic band, securing it low on the nape of his neck. Useful device, even though he preferred his hair unbound.

'No, not happening. You aren't taking him anywhere, much less touching him.' Sesshomaru recalled the short objection Stark made when he agreed to go with Fury. Sesshomaru, of course, wouldn't have allowed SHIELD to harm him, much less touch him. Sesshomaru stood straight on the antenna, prepared to spring skyward when he heard a massive shrieking noise originating at the tower.

A smoking projectile ascended rapidly into the air from the tower and Sesshomaru watched wide-eyed at the display. His barrier didn't alert him, in fact…

He sensed his own youki!

The projectile shot far into the sky, Sesshomaru could no longer see it, however, he could still hear it. It soared much higher than he could leap.

A second later a firework of blue shimmering youki, then from the flares of that firework, more explosions fanning out, the radius, perhaps five times greater than the original expanded far above the metropolis and beyond.

"..." Sesshomaru remained speechless as the shimmering, blue and green youki slowly drifted down like snowflakes across the city.

'So, Stark has not only replicated my proximity barrier but has improved it. Maybe this display is to inform me that he no longer wants my assistance in defending his tower. I have been rejected.' Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and lowered his ears. Something in Sesshomaru faltered, a stinging prickle of disappointment and melancholy.

Sesshomaru had no time to react as an explosion to his immediate right rocked him off the antenna. His eardrums burst with a clot of blood at the sound and he flipped back to see a familiar suit of armor rocketing towards him.

Stark wanted a spar!

His ears rang, and all the sounds muddled together but that didn't mean he couldn't fight back. He twisted in the air to avoid another volley of projectiles and summoned his whip. Bounding off the skyscraper, he slashed his whip through the air, cutting more blasts out of the sky before launching...
himself at Stark. Sesshomaru smirked despite himself, this was a form of communication he could get behind. He refused Bakusaiga's pleas for attention, he would not use her against Stark, he could spar just fine on his own.

He avoided using his left arm while spinning through the air after the evading Stark. He almost looped his whip of light around Stark's armored ankle when Stark stopped short and fired down at him with his youki infused projectiles.

He artfully dodged them and rebounded off a shorter building to counter-attack when the hair on the back of his neck pricked up in alarm.

Ping!

The new, stronger barrier resounded.

Stark's suit fired off an onslaught of projectiles that Sesshomaru's close range he couldn't avoid. He dipped and spun from most but an energy bolt caught him on the left shoulder. That. Stung. Maybe he misread Stark again.

Stark pursued him with another overwhelming array of blasts. Uncharacteristically, his thoughts about his mother and the second Astral Plane window crashed through his head. 'He wouldn't actually try to kill me over this, would he?'

No. Stark wouldn't. He somehow knew it.

Sesshomaru visibly winced and corrected his trajectory. He tried his hardest not to show weakness as the barrage intensified. Pops of pain that he would have usually been able to deflect with youki blossomed across his body from the blasts. He couldn't maneuver himself as well as Stark could without giving away his flying ability, which he still wanted to keep secret.

Spinning in a sloppy, haphazard spiral, the Demon Lord fell, but not before finally lassoing Stark's right leg with his whip and slinging him into him. He took a point-blank blast to the chest, but that was acceptable because he extended his talons long and slashed at the back-propulsion unit on the suit, rendering it inoperable.

Together in a tight dive they careened straight down and broke apart at the last minute. Sesshomarru landed hard in a patch of well-maintained grass, in a ruined sweatshirt, hair tied back, skin bruised.

Stark advanced immediately, and Sesshomaru readied himself. A spar he wanted, a spar he received. Lady Potts was correct.

Be careful what you wish for.

Chapter End Notes

A chapter in which: Sesshomaru has mommy issues, Pepper has to keep a secret, and poor Bruce is taken for a ride.

Yikes! sorry this update took so long. Things have gotten crazy busy for me lately and this chapter was sort of a trainwreck at first that I slowly had to sort out. Thank all of you for all your wonderful support! I hope this was a good chapter for everyone...no
kiss and make up this chapter...

...but maybe the next. maybe. ;)

- TL
Tony and the Curveball

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony and the Curveball

*(*)

Tony had a lot to get out of his system after landing on the manicured turf of Yankee Stadium. A lot being the understatement of the century. Natasha's snart-ass suggestion didn't help.

The only time he felt this close to losing his shit was when shot his way out of that cave Afghanistan. He only knew of one thing that could make it better: taking out his frustrations on a certain oblivious Demon Lord and bringing him home.

Tony didn't miss the irony that he had gotten exactly what requested: him out of the tower and here he was dragging him back home. Cute.

Well, it's not like he only wanted Sesshomaru gone. He had wanted them all gone.

He had wanted to go back to the way things were. It was safer that way, better, smarter. He didn't have to deal with people coming from the bifrost, SHIELD, or otherwise and somehow manipulating him into doing what they wanted. Less than a month ago, he didn't have to deal with a Demon Lord getting his chest blown out on his front lawn.

He didn't have to deal with gazing into that daunting, gaping void of trust. Which, by the way, was way more terrifying than any space portal. Tony would know.

His foray into trust with an aloof, weirdo Demon Lord blew like a VS-50 landmine, but he graciously allowed him to stay. He couldn't send them packing, he lost that battle, but he knew how to win wars. If he let SHIELD take Sesshomaru, he would have lost more than just that fight, SHIELD would have won the whole thing. SHIELD would have definitely thrown him into some 'Hanoi Hilton' and tried to study his DNA, tried and may have succeeded in taking away both of his swords to try their hands at producing their own super weapons.

The thought of Sesshomaru strapped to some table by his thin striped wrists made his blood surge. The sight of unfocused, glassy gold eyes and clumped silver hair incited a fire in him that smoked out his lungs better than any blowtorch.

He didn't want to react so viscerally to Sesshomaru baring his fangs at some nameless SHIELD agents or his delicate, pointed ears lowered and flattened in threat. He didn't want to care so much, but he was going run with it. It lined up with his personal belief that SHIELD shouldn't get to just capture anyone.

He how grueling, chest-caving, thought hollowing torture was. How being broken down to nothing more than a tool to be used, and he wasn't about to let it happen to anyone he gave a damn about, especially his moody Demon Lord.

But he volunteered for it! At first Tony couldn't wrap his mind around it, he would walk into the Lion's Den for Loki….but when the dust of his whirlwind emotion settled, he realized he would do the same for Rhodes or Pepper.
And SHIELD tried to kill two birds with one surface to air missile: get a new super weapon, they
did lose the Tesseract after all, and attempt to render Tony Stark and his weapons obsolete.

And Tony wouldn't and couldn't ever be obsolete, but not that SHIELD would be smart enough to
understand that.

Tony knew that SHIELD wanted to be independent of him. Let 'em try. Tony knew now with a
threat of an invasion looming that they could find some funding from other governments, NGOs,
private citizens, but it probably wouldn't be enough. Too bad, he'd be revoking their funding
anyway starting today.

Yeah, Fury didn't get to 'extreme home makover' a living room Pepper had all picked out, hack
Jarvis, use his tech, and try to take his stuff, and continue to get his money. He knew he once said:
keep your friends rich and your enemies rich and then find out which is which, but even that advice
had its limits.

SHIELD needed him, not the other way around.

Preventing Fury from getting what he wanted on principle wasn't the only reason he didn't want
Sesshomaru shackled in SHIELD's detainee bunker. He came to terms with, for better or for worse
(geez bad marriage vow pun there) he wanted the Demon, and he got what he wanted.

Which is why once again he had to go get him back. Again. He would have had to get a microchip
chip ready for him if he didn't already have a scaled down version of D.E.M.O.N.S. ready at Stark
Tower. With that up, he could locate, find, stalk, and hunt the current object of his complete
frustration in no time flat.

Before, he activated D.E.M.O.N.S. he couldn't tell if the barrier had pinged him or not. It was a
weird, sight tug on his chest like bad heartburn. It wasn't until Pepper came back with a busted
phone and that he kicked himself for not suiting up.

He had been on a roll when she came in. He was tracing every line of code, every server the trace
bounced off from to locate the origin of the hack and he was so close. Slamming his fist on his
work desk yelling 'Eureka! Tony Stark is hot', close.

She came by to say, apparently three things: One to remind him of the SI gala, aka snoozefest with
those same wind-farm people tomorrow. He was going to put up a fight that now was not the best
time to go hobnob with some pearl clunchers and 'smoking jacket' wearing clowns but he didn’t.
Only because she was so shaken about something else; she was being quiet. Pepper would usually
be lecturing him on how he swore he'd go and how he was ignoring the company… but instead she
just held out her phone.

She asked for a new Starkphone, easily done, and for him to go talk to a Demon Lord who
apparently earned her trust. Not so easily done and he let her know that.

Pepper scowled, forming those those little lines between her eyebrows. Tony would bet Jarvis that
she was hiding something important, like 'Thor proposed to Steve with Mjolnir' important.

He let her go because she unintentionally struck a nerve with him. It irrationally annoyed him that
Pepper would have him go to Sesshomaru, not the other way around. If he really 'got it' he would
come home. It caused his pulse to jackhammer in his ears. He fought his ego, his own gnawing,
acidic anxiety about falling for any trap or intricately worded noose that SHIELD slung up for him.
He fought it hard.
And Sailor Moon just thumbed his nose at him, like he loved to do to valet drivers he knew would scratch his car. It didn't even occur in his mind that what he did was actually a fucking hard thing for him to do.

"Sir, I must advise that the previous chaff projectile so close to the Chrysler building, along with our indelicate landing in Yankee Stadium has rendered your previous goal of 'stealth' mission, rather moot." Jarvis sounded in his ear and Tony sighed. He readied his repulsors and his scanned an unamused Sesshomaru standing in a partially shredded red hoodie.

'Bruce didn't mention his new grunge look. Is he trying to look like a back-up bass player for a subpar garage band?' Tony then noticed his hair was pulled back and his chest clenched and his blood simmered, cramping his lungs. Who did he let dress him? Courtney Love?

"Stealth just didn't seem as rewarding when I really thought about it. Guess I just can't do low profile." Tony flexed his fist and debated if he should really go no holds barred in a decision Steve would definitely think would be 'ill-advised'. Ill-advised it was then. He had a lesson to teach. School was in session.

First class on the schedule: discrete mathematics.

Everything Sesshomaru did, he calculated. He readjusted his Backstreet Boy blast to avoid him when the Chitauri came back. He saw him spar with Reindeer games. Every glance, every flick of a wrist he overthought like a tween asking out his first crush. So, just how did he equate dancing to the pied piper Loki's fife with something he would ever want?

He got out of Bruce what made his genius brain get manipulated by Reindeer Games.

"Sir, The Jolly Green Traitor requests your presence." Tony ran a hand down his face and throat to rest it on his arc reactor. He drummed his fingers and leaned back.

He found the origin of the hack. Clint's hardware. Clint's ip address, user ID, password, everything. It took a long time, the trail bounced, redirected, off countless servers, but it started with Clint.

Whoever this hacker was, was good. Not SHIELD good, better. Like, almost as good as him, which spooked him. Natasha was also at a loss from the text he received from her: 'No luck on the weasel, but he will go 'pop' soon.'

He didn't trust her to care about his own security; he trusted her to care about helping Clint.

Throughout the hack, he kept finding scrambled bits of code, little blips here and there of 'Operation: Ultron' and the code words 'Merlin', and 'Blue Duck'.

Tony wasn't born yesterday: he knew it wasn't Clint. Despite pissing him off with flirting with his man-candy, he believed he was definitely being groomed as the perfect fall guy.

Clint also couldn't weave a tapestry of code this intricate. Mayyybe Natasha on an extremely good day, and apparently, this mystery hacker could as well. That that didn't sit well with Tony. Nothing at the moment did, so he sipped on his scotch, which he upgraded to after Pep left, and decided not to tell anyone what he found out.

And he no idea what 'Operation: Ultron' could be or what information they got from Jarvis on his
records. Apparently, he didn't get everything when he hacked SHIELD’S records on the helicarrier three years ago.

Tony stood up, feeling just a shade lightheaded. It was about time to turn this all around. He'd show Bruce just how badly he fucked up.

"Jarvis ready phase one of D.E.M.O.N.S. It's time to shine." Tony took one more swig of scotch for the road and strode out with a confidence he was determined to make real in his tense chest.

He almost ran right into Bruce he was so in his own head.

"Beware all… did you really have Dum-e write 'ye'? And is that supposed to be Fury?" Bruce gestured to Dum-e who held up which read 'Beware all ye who enter.' With a not so coincidental likeness to Fury's face with a cross bones beneath it.

He had a few quips up his sleeve, like 'if the peg leg fits'...but he just wasn't feeling it.

"What do you want, Benedict Banner? I'm thin on humor for thieves." Tony didn't want to say his name, maybe he was being petty but he just couldn't pretend everything was a-ok. Shipshape if they were keeping the pirate theme going.

"I came back to reconcile, I guess." Bruce replied, voice losing the humorous edge it previously had.

"You guess? Huh, see, Robin Hood, I was sort of hoping for more of a grovel at my feet, begging for forgiveness sort of reconciliation." Tony squared up to Bruce who simply exhaled deeply and adjusted his glasses.

"I'm sorry Tony. I don't expect you to forgive me easily, or I guess, anytime soon." Bruce said simply and even though he read earnest as he usually did, Tony didn't buy that he really got it.

Tony drummed his fingers on his arc reactor, the youki inside tingled against his finger tips.

"It wasn't just about Sailor Moon. It wasn't just about my ego, it definitely wasn't about the whole teamwork thing. Weapons. You knew, Natasha knew. I got out of that, way out. I was finally free. Free of… my father's shadow, free of hurting people for my own gain and what?…What Bruce? What did you do? You hand delivered Cerberus and Blitzen to an organization we both don't trust. Two toxins, specifically tailored, mind you, to kill the guy who knows most about our enemy and a guy who you know I got a…whatever with. Those toxins, if properly weaponized, could revolutionize chemical warfare, did you think about that? Everything...everything I worked so hard to get past, Everything I worked so hard to protect, you helped destroy, or use to potentially start WWIII." Tony caught the fire in his chest and spat it out like an M9 Armored flamethrower.

Tony ignored the deep-down gut twist that this wasn't really all Bruce's fault. But he was here, and he was getting the heat. He should have known. He trusted him. He let him in his lab, gave him access. He broke that.

"Tony, SHIELD doesn't have the toxins, only Natasha touched them. We were trying to protect you." Bruce hissed out like a deflating balloon and Tony wouldn't stand for it.

"Funny, see maybe my memory is fuzzy, but, which organization almost nuked New York and who flew the nuke into a space portal? Who really protects who? Which guy is literally named the God of Lies? You should have trusted me over them." Tony's anger still bubbled in his brain as he strode past Bruce and up to the roof.
“Tony...maybe you're right, but this invasion...the way Loki acts. He acts like we won't all walk away from this. He acts like it would be a miracle if we did.” Bruce led and Tony battled the static in his head and the sandpaper in his lungs. He knew that. He doubted Loki would have given him some stupid magic poison if he didn't think all of Midgard's 'ants' would get fried by a magnifying glass.

"It's not all about Bambi, but fine. Maybe we won't. Maybe that huge beer-bong shaped space ship, 'Underwear' or whatever, will tear the Earth apart. Maybe none of us will make it, but I'll be damned if I'm letting SHIELD shoot someone I care about, let alone have my friends think I'm not capable of defending myself and mine. I'm Tony Stark, former merchant of death turned Iron Man and that this is all on me, not SHIELD, not 'Snakes on a Plane.'" Tony motioned with his jaw out to the roof and Bruce followed wordlessly.

"You can't act like this is all on you, you're a part of the Avengers." Bruce's voice dropped and Tony ignored the implication that he was being dramatic. It was the equivalent of someone telling him to calm down. How could he have through that Bruce knew him so well? Sure, he was a genius like he was, but he didn't get him.

A shadow of loneliness huddled into the back of Tony's mind.

"Et tu Brute Bannerus? Wrong. What exactly has SHIELD done so far? How stable is Loki? Yeah, thought so, and I think your little stunt today definitely proves I am." Tony put out his finger and pointed to the sky. He had installed a miniature anti-ballistic missile interceptor launch point in the base of Stark Tower in case SHIELD had the brilliant idea to nuke New York again. "Distant Extraterrestrial Military Orbital Neural Signal. D.E.M.O.N.S. for short, it's loosely based off my old Jericho."

"And Phil thought SHIELD was a mouthful." Bruce smirked but Tony was just too mad to let him get away with humor so he hardened his stare. His skin could be smoking his blood had so much fire in it. "You finally got the proximity barrier viable?" Tony ignored the recovery question because he was done saying 'yes'.

"Just watch, it's my turn for a show." Tony pressed the touch screen and the rocket lifted off with the capsules of youki inside he had personally developed.

"It's funny. You say it's all on you, but who's uh...magic are you using here?" Bruce's glasses gleamed softly from the exploding blue youki. And Tony whipped around quickly, offended.

"You know he isn't magic, that's Cobra Commander, and I'm done talking about him. Sesshomaru is, like we've studied, a thermal imaging, astral body detecting, super predator...who is on my last nerve." Tony flushed with anger, he wasn't going to let him avoid him.

"Maybe you should just go get Clifford, and save us all a headache?" It had to be Natasha. She was a damn ninja. He wished D.E.M.O.N.S. worked against people who were plain grating.

"Jarvis suit me up." He darted a sharp, dark look Natasha's way and would have said something particularly nasty if it hadn't been for Little Miss Sunshine standing next to her. Human shields, really Natasha?

"For the record, I'm just testing D.E.M.O.N.S., not bringing him back." With his Mark XLVI suit fully equipped he launched after the one place he could find that pain in the ass, the Chrysler Building.
"You know, I've had a long day and the last thing I wanted to do is have to order pick-up when I really wanted delivery." Tony, decided that maybe firing off repulsor blasts in Yankee Stadium wouldn't be the best use of his rage, and again the whole 'reformed reckless menace' thing.

'Iron Man goes into violent rampage in Yankee Stadium.' Yeah maybe he would save Pep that headache. Her quiet demeanor still bothered him. Pepper didn't do quiet. She did manic rambling, accusations, and lectures.

"Ok, if you decided to be Loki's pet today because you thought I needed protection, you're way off base. Who picked up your blue sword and protected you today? Oh yeah, me. Not Bambi, not your crush, Legolas, me! If anyone needs protection, it's you." Tony barbed. Though the main propulsion on the back of his suit was corroded, he had enough to rocket towards Sesshomaru. With his right arm jacked back and his face twisted in a determined frown he unleashed a vicious right cross.

Which Sesshomaru dodged, gracefully. He could've at least blocked it! It just made Tony see a more vivid shade of red.

Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and the infamous, deadly toxin formulated on his right arm as he swiped back with a quick counter. Tony twisted out of the way, but the claws clipped him anyway. Jarvis chattered but he recovered into a back-roundhouse kick which glanced Sesshomaru's left shoulder.

"Strike One… If you think my suit is just for show you're in for a rude awakening. This privatized world peace, it just so also happens to look good. I carried a nuclear warhead into space and came back to tell the tale. My mind and my tech saved me, and the people close to me." Tony held up a finger and sure as hell didn't miss the clenched jaw of Sesshomaru who darted quickly out of the way. He still got it, he wasn't rusty, he was ready.

Sesshomaru didn't respond with anything as he charged forward and raked his talons from the left shoulder down his arm, green sparks popping through the air. It made the hair on the back of his neck stand on end.

Those same claws that trickled down his skin last night, that caused him to shiver and moan now turned on him. Was this now considered poetic?

"Easy on the merchandise princess, wouldn't want to break a nail." Tony taunted and wanted the reaction of 'This Sesshomaru is no woman' but Sailor Moon didn't even bat an eyelash. His ears however still moved and tented the torn 'heroin addict starter kit' sweatshirt. He wanted to tear the hood off his head and rip his hair free from that ponytail.

Was this some sort of disguise? Worst spy ever. How ridiculous he looked wearing a dirty, torn up hoodie with… what looked like nothing underneath it? Didn't he understand the concept of outerwear?

"Silent treatment? You can't possibly be pissy with me. You aren't the one just hosted the worst press conference in Stark Industries history, and this included my congressional hearing." Tony reignited the fire in his chest. He had a goal, he wanted to show him exactly who he pissed off. Exactly what he was made of.

Nothing.
"You arent the one who was betrayed by someone he trusted so well he gave him full access to his lab. I was." He barely managed to twist out of the way from a well-placed punch to circle around and deliver another crushing blow to Sesshomaru's back.

"Strike two, not on your A game are you Sailor Moon?" Tony his chest loosened, but he wasn't at all sure why. A part of him was happy to work all of this out, and to finally feel on top again. In control, firmly situated in the driver's seat.

Another part was just pretty stoked to spar against him and hold his own.

The force of the blow on Sesshomaru's back caused the Demon to vault forward and curl into a diving roll, flipping backwards.

That blow he hit him with shouldn't have sent him that off balance. Tony didn't get it, was he going easy on him? He just weathered those cannon attacks, why was he so easily overpowered now?

"Are you better not be going easy on me? If so, dick move. Time for Tony Stark to get serious. Yankee Stadium could use a face-lift anyway." Tony's sternum cramped acutely at the bile bubbling possibility. If Sesshomaru was holding back or going easy, has to change classes.

Second class on the schedule: trigonometry.

The only response he got was Sesshomaru uncoiling his glowing whip. His face remained impassive as ever.

"Ok, still nothing. I sacrificed my reputation, my pride, who knows probably my sanity. Everything that makes me, me, for you stay here at Stark Tower and you just ran away. And why did I have to do that? Oh, I know why, because you value Loki's assbackwards friendship over yourself, and me." Tony's lungs had shards of glass lacerating them he was so enraged. He wasn't shouting though as he walked surely over to Sesshomaru, chest repulsor glowing.

"I bet if Loki said jump off the bifrost you'd ask which side. If told you to wear a tie, I bet you would have worn one, and it'd be green." Tony wasn't sure why he thought of the tie thing, but the thought of Sesshomaru in green ratcheted up the chest repulsor's power to the youki enhanced 330%.

Sesshomaru's whip glowed a sinister green as he began to spin it.

"Why did you let yourself get hurt? Because Horns thinks it's a good idea? To preempt a supposed attack on my tower? To make Loki look good? He used you! He used you to fuck yourself and me over, and you don't care. You don't get it. I trusted you; I let you in. Your youki is in my suit. You were supposed to stop going solo and putting yourself in senseless danger. We were supposed to be a team, equals." He ignored Jarvis' endless nagging and planted his left foot and decided, fuck it. He rocketed towards Sesshomaru and fired both of his hand repulsors at the same time as a decoy.

Tony knew from watching Sesshomaru's spars he had issues with a barrage of long distance attacks. Sesshomaru whipped the two decoy shots out of the air just in time, but Tony timed his final attack perfectly. His chest repulsor went off, crimson hot. It hit him straight in the chest when his whip had slung back on the return. Sesshomaru fell into a kneel on the turf.

He had gotten pretty good at fighting guys with whips. Not that he was anything like Ivan Vanko. Not even close, but the overall principle remained the same.

"Strike three aaaand that's ball game, funny thing, I've never been much of a fan of sports, but I do love a good metaphor. Well…not you probably can appreciate my wit. I doubt you've been
watching sportscent...um Lassie?" Tony rambled, blood pressure lessening and his pulse had stopped thundering in his temples. Wait, when had his pulse started racing that hard? Ok so maybe he went a little overboard with that repulsor blast. He meant to let off a little steam, but Sesshomaru was still kneeling, hood fallen off his head, silver hair still pulled back, streaming over his left shoulder, looking almost like Thor when he did his kneeling thing with mjolnir.

'Goal, achieved. I meant to rough him up. He couldn't be that hurt, his sword would have protected him, right? Or if he thought it would be too bad, he could have just deflected the shot with some of his youki. There was no way I'm going to feel guilty about this when he was going easy on me this whole time.' Tony resolutely walked over towards the Demon Lord who still had his right hand to his chest, ears back.

"Moonie, get up, let's go. I don't do extra innings." No response. Tony approached and Sesshomaru tipped his head up, eyes hard, jaw clenched, bangs sticking to the blue moon on his forehead. Dried blood streaked down his neck. He flipped up his face plate to make sure he was seeing him right in his eyes.

"Lesson learned: Never go easy on me, I'm full of surprises. You didn't even try to make it fun and least acknowledge my questions." Tony, now standing over him saw his white eyebrows knit forward in confusion as his sharp gold eyes watched his lips.

"...This Sesshomaru does not employ Bakusaiga in spars, nor did I hear you address me." It was Tony's turn to rock back in confusion. The blood down his neck had dribbled down his ears. The whole Anne Rice thing. Did his ear drums rupture again? What about those stupid hear aint's? Why didn't have them in? Did they get damaged?

"You're telling me that you didn't even hear any of it? Great, I've become Happy when I put the divider up in the Limo. What happened to your ears? " Tony sighed. He had wasted all of that energy, said all of that, well he wasn't about to go and repeat all of it now.

"...The device was damaged from the bullet, I removed both of them. My eardrums ruptured and I lack the youki to heal them." That caught Tony's attention. Wait. Fuck. Blitzen. Was it still in his system? He was able amplify its molecular structure a bit more than he could Sirius and Cerberus. It was then through one of the tears in the sweatshirt he spotted what had to be part of a bandage. Did Bruce bandage him up?

Is that why he didn't deflect any of the shots with his youki?

Maybe he hadn't been going easy on him. Maybe he had just been kicking a dog when it was down. Dick move. Despite, logically, Tony knowing he had every right to knock his block off for what he had done earlier, his gut churned like he had eaten a bad burrito.

"Well, that's what you get when you follow Jafar's orders, your body starts shutting down from his mouth garbage he calls words… Why did you do it?" Tony offered right hand to help him up, and noticed that Sesshomaru grabbed his wrist with his right hand. He didn't have to feel his body heat to have his mouth go dry at seeing the red stripes on his red suit.

The shade of red matched perfectly.

But then he noticed he hadn't grabbed his hand with his left, which was closer and made more sense…he hadn't actually used it at all. He helped Sesshomaru up and immediately yanked open one of the tears in the hoodie. His left shoulder was black and blue and most certainly broken, maybe dislocated.
That's right, Mjolnir.

He had taken a sucker hit from Mjolnir at close range, and he knew first hand that Point Break had a mean swing. Damnit. He had basically been fighting him deaf and one handed. Why did he do this to him? Why did he have to make him feel so guilty when he deserved a good kick in the ass?

Sesshomaru sighed through his nose.

"This Sesshomaru does not follow anyone. I have not followed an order in centuries, and I refuse to answer your inquiry." Sesshomaru seethed and Tony praised himself for hitting a non-physical sore spot. He examined the Demon Lord in front of him and inwardly winced. Now that he really looked at him, he had definitely seen better days.

His chest repulsor blast also welted his chest. Tony then looked at the youki infused repulsors, if Sesshomaru still lacked the youki to heal...maybe he could give him some?

"Question game. Set of three. Deal?" Tony's voice cannoned through the still air. Sesshomaru, regarded him uneasily. His gold eyes sharpened as he let go of Tony's wrist and despite everything, he missed the hand there.

"I acquiesce." Sesshomaru responded slowly. Tony put his palm out on his shoulder and put the repulsor strength on thirteen percent capacity and reset the wavelength and frequency to only emit the youki.

"Why didn't you come back?" Tony pointedly ignored the widening of Sesshomaru's eyes. Did he fear he would hit him at point blank range? He wasn't that much of a jackass. "Work with me here." Tony added and the repulsor flared to life.

"Your invitation was forced from you. You genuinely didn't seem to desire my presence any longer." Sesshomaru turned his head to his shoulder and narrowed his eyes, and looked back, features softening and Tony watched the shoulder, transfixed as the swelling went down.

Not want him?! He was everything. Need, no Tony Stark didn't do need. Desire...he wouldn't have done what he did for just anyone. But fair enough, he definitely would have liked some space...but yet. Here he was! Dragging his pale ass back home.

"Forced? No one forces me to do anything. I chose to lose a battle so I could win a war. I let you stay because for all Loki soliloquys about seeing around every corner, he certainly didn't see how today was going to turn out. I did. Bambi lost his mind and you were going to pay the price for what SHIELD was trying to turn into a win-win for them. Them getting you, and making me obsolete." Tony fired off quickly again. Sesshomaru's full lips thinned and Tony really just wanted to punish them again. Tony noticed that the dark, black bruising he was currently helping to heal was beginning to fade into an ugly yellow and fuchsia, or (is this puce?) color.

"Also, joke's on Fury, because now I can force you three to leave and there isn't a damn thing he can do about it." Tony smirked and Sesshomaru's red ears pricked up. He was still going to fuck with him. "But, I think I'll keep you around, you're starting to match my suits."

He couldn't get too mad at Thor for what he did, but it still didn't sit well with him.

"...This city has far too many humans in it for my liking. Your tower is the only place I can tolerate." Sesshomaru locked his sharp gold eyes on Tony's and his insides shredded like pulled chicken. He missed this, but he'd never admit it.

"So, you keep leaving the tower because you're a secret masochist?" Tony asked, kicking himself.
He wanted to ask him what he did with Pepper, not keep rehashing something and sounding like some D-list celebrity soap opera star whom Thor could out-act.

"...It is not in my nature to linger in one place for long." Sesshomaru's ears lowered and Tony's blood began to simmer. He was right, he was just going to leave again. No. He was saying he wasn't going to stay in this time at all. Tony ripped his hand back and was about to say something when Sesshomaru opened that small mouth of his again. "But this Sesshomaru is no slave to his nature." He finished and Tony's gut launched to his throat like a torpedo.

Did this mean he wanted to try to stay? He could be so damn vague and cryptic and this stupid glimmer of hope made him angry.

"Because of Loki." Tony's voice raised, and he could tell blood rushed to his temples once more.

"I stayed on my own volition." Sesshomaru slowly clarified, eyes lazering into him.

"You say you don't follow him, but you just do whatever he says. He asked you help him prove another invasion was coming, he asked you to prove he failed an invasion on purpose, he convinced you to take part in this charade earlier today. You just do as he says, when he says it." Sesshomaru's eyes widened and those silvery eyebrows slanted ever so slightly.

Bingo, that's the reaction he was looking for.

"...You must think little of this Sesshomaru, to imply such motivations and lack of insight." Tony struck a nerve because Sesshomaru's voice dropped sharply and his fangs flashed. Tony decided to roll with it, but he didn't want to lose him. He still had one more question to ask after all.

"I get one more question, Sailor Moon, it's a good one so sit tight." Tony persisted, he always got what he wanted and he wanted to hear it from him. That he wasn't just here because of Loki. "Did you almost attack Fury and say you'd go with SHIELD to survivor island, only because of Loki?" Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and then Tony knew he wasn't hallucinating when he saw his eyes bleed red and his markings move. Molecularly, he still didn't know how his skin could change colors like that. He could probably study him for years and still not tap the surface.

Sesshomaru jumped back, snarling, hand glowing green and blue youki pooling around his feet.

"You ordered me to leave despite not days ago desiring me to stay. You cast me out, and as a result splintered your beloved team. It was the only option left to protect Loki and Banner, and honor your order, your rule of your domain." Then it clicked for him. He said the words he needed to hear. Wanted not needed. Tony Stark didn't need.

Then Tony noticed his eyes started to bleed fully red and his hair started to spike. Shit. Maybe he went too far.

"Would you rather me have slain your Fury immediately with Bakusaiga, endangering the mission? Would you have rather me dishonor the law in your fortress and demand that Loki stay to protect him, like Rogers suggested? Would have rather me show my true form and rupture your humans' fragile harmony? Enlighten me of what you desired me to do when you clearly do not value me." Sesshomaru growled out, and Tony tilted his head to the side. Not value him? He couldn't be more off base, God did he hate the amount of baseball puns he was making.

'That was it. His immortality complex plus him not thinking I could care equaled helping Loki with the invasion. Everything he does he calculates.' Tony's arc reactor brightened, but went unnoticed.

Last class: Home Economics.
"The answers to your questions are no, no, no, and wrong." Tony announced with a wide, triumphant grin he should have trademarked. Sesshomaru's ears pricked up, touching the fabric at Stark's simple answer.

"Explain." Sesshomaru hissed, but Tony approached him calmly. By now they were practically at second base.

"Well, no to the first question because I'd rather you not make my tower into the next Chernobyl. No to the second, because you're right: my tower, my rules. No to the third, because I have no idea what you're talking about, but it sounds like a huge pain. Wrong to the last because who said I don't value you?" Tony put out his gloved hand and reactivated the repulsor on his shoulder, Sesshomaru still as marble.

"Everything you do deliberately calculated, even when it comes to Reindeer Games. Hell, you probably grow hair intentionally. I figured you wouldn't do it without a…well to you logical reason. I just wanted to know what it was." Tony continued "Time is money, and I don't waste time tracking down strays if I don't value them." Tony watched as Sesshomaru's full lips parted ever so slightly.

He attacked them with his own, tongue twisting in past his fangs.

Damn did he still send tingles down his spine. Damn did he still make him go semi hard already.

"You're coming back with me. You still owe me for the heart attack you caused me, and then some. " Tony's brown eyes danced dark and forbidden when he broke away from the kiss.

Pause.

"Very well." Sesshomaru murmured and reached up with his left arm and ran a talon down the wrist of his left glove. Tony hadn't realized till just then that Sesshomaru's shoulder had all but healed completely.

"You. Me. Workshop. Like Yesterday." Tony flipped his face plate back on and to be honest, he didn't remember much about the flight back to his tower, or even taking off his suit.

He just remembered getting to his workshop, Demon in tow, and with strong arms he closing the gap between them by grabbing he back of Sesshomaru's head and forcing his mouth on Sesshomaru's with a voracious hunger.

Their bodies crashed together, Sesshomaru shoving Tony against his lab table, jostling off junk. Cautiously, as if testing icy waters, the object of Tony's obsession raked his claws lightly up Tony's back, placing the other at his jawline, where the curve met his ear and his neck. Tony's blood flooded both of his heads and he lost himself to the buzz. He reached around and grabbed that ass that he needed to take the pants off.

He was going to be in the driver's seat this time.

Tony ripped the hooded sweatshirt off him, causing his ponytail to thrash everywhere. He tugged out the hairtie holding the hair in place and hardened like an aircraft carrier seeing as he was supposed to be. Sharp gold eyes, silver hair everywhere, stripes up his ribcage and lips parted.

He ignored the welt on his chest from his repulsor. It was out of place, and ugly. It would heal.

"No more drug dealer hoodies, it just doesn't do you justice." Tony winked and Sesshomaru
responded by with super-human speed shredding his own shirt off. Fair play.

'Sailor Moon will forget every letter except the ones that spell my name. He will tremble and worship me.' Tony wanted to punish the Demon Lord, but this time in a different, much more fun, rewarding way.

Tony quirked his mouth into a smirk against pale white skin and sucked his neck again. He tasted the dried blood and remembered that he would have to get him a replacement pair of 'hear aint's' before he left the workshop. But he didn't dwell on that long when he heard a sudden and almost whistling intake of air from the typically unemotional Demon.

It got his rocks hard just thinking only he could do this to him.

He peeled back, reveling in sight. He was everything he wasn't supposed to want. A pointy eared, arrogant, lethal, brittle shard of a life form that could regenerate limbs but couldn't handle a rock concert's decibel level.

This Demon could never bore him. This Demon provoked every dirty, taboo, and jarring thought into his mind and made his mouth water.

Tony shoved him up roughly against the wall of his workshop, tools clinking and clanging, charging his mouth to his. He felt the familiar tingle of his tongue and dove right in. He pressed his chest into Sesshomaru's, as if to press him through the wall, chaos theory put into practice.

Tony had a firm grip on his neck, thumb pressing down hard on the corner of the right side of his jaw, fingers digging in on the left. He wanted Sesshomaru to be the white-hot, jittery mess he made him earlier. He was Tony Stark and no one did that to him.

He bit down hard on his full bottom lip, sucking it like he had to siphon gas from a car. He tasted the familiar metal tang he tasted the night before. Suddenly exhilarated he, with a very practiced hand, unbuttoned Sesshomaru's white pants, shoving them down to his knees, then falling to his ankles. He wasn't wearing anything at all underneath, and that made Tony's insides liquefy into lava knowing he was just a thin layer of fabric away from that this whole time.

'Going commando for the press conference, unexpected. Deliberately getting shot and going commando while wearing white pants, that's fucking bold. I can never guess what he is going to do next.' Snowflakes darted through Tony's bloodstream.

"I'm going to ruin you." Tony breathed into his ear, before taking it into his mouth, running his tongue along its pointed edge, getting a soft gasp from Sesshomaru. He raked his teeth down its pointed shell as he reached down and grabbed his hard cock, taking a rough, strong cup of his balls and working them like beanbags.

Tony heard a growl and he immediately sealed his mouth over his, he wasn't just allowed to make noises like that. He plunged his tongue, thrashing it, deep stifling any other noise he could make, ignoring the grazing fangs and his coiling tongue.

He took his hand from applying pressure to the sides his neck to his own pants, removing, dropping, then kicking them off. His own dick hard as concrete, tenting his silk boxers, he removed those too, his cock already leaking and wet.

Tony broke apart the kiss, glaring into Sesshomaru's eyes, pupils dilated and lips swollen and red. He grabbed the sides of his head, fingers trapping his ears and pushed him to his knees.

Finally, the Demon Lord knelt before him. His groin twitched and pulsed in anticipation. He would
get to have that intoxicating mouth around him again. He would get to have those gold eyes molten in lust just for him.

"Oh yeah, you know what I want." Tony gazed down and Sesshomaru wasted no time in taking his soft, smooth hand to wrap it around Tony's lower back. He massaged and released the tension there better than any highly paid 'masseuse' Tony had. His knees turned into jelly, Sailor Moon's hands could turn steel to bread dough.

Sesshomaru then took his tongue and flicked the tip, as if removing the fluid there before taking Tony's awaiting cock in his hand, pumping to the tip as he licked his lips, sealed around his head and Tony moaned deep when he felt the inhuman suction and humid heat.

Oh, damn he missed this. He really needed him. Want. Not need. He reminded himself.

Sesshomaru began to bob back and forth with chaotic speeds while his fingers met his mouth at the base, lassoing it tight. That stupid movie American Pie was right on the money. Sesshomaru's mouth: all rich, tartly sweet, and tingly cinnamon apple pie.

He could have him every day. He would have his wet, hungry mouth all over him, licking him clean, sucking the decay of his poor life choices out of him. Something shifted within Tony, something deep down loosened and released.

Oh damn not yet. Not before I-

His thoughts short circuited when Sesshomaru's hand sneaked like water between his legs and began to knead his taint with unholy pressure while upping the tempo on his cock. He went go to his toes and he threw his head back, examining the ceiling, panting like a dog in heat.

He rocked into Sesshomaru, throwing his own rhythm into the exchange and immediately smiled in the realization that Sesshomaru met his pace with a flourish of a long tongue.

"Yeah, take it." Is all Tony could manage as he pushed Sesshomaru deep on him. He wanted to feel the back of his throat with his sensitive tip. He wanted to feel Sesshomaru's long tongue lash out at the sensitive seam on the bottom of his dick, drawing shuddering waves out of him. He had to have Sesshomaru to suck the soul out of him, he craved it, more than his morning coffee, more than any scotch. More than anything else.

"Yes, God, just like that!" 'That sneaky hand again, that pressure, damn, I I I…'

'Damn, he makes me feel…inhuman.' Tony bit his lip, he was about to blow, but he wasn't done with Sailor Moon yet. He rocked out of his mouth, pulling him back up and attacking his lips again, tasting himself on his lips, in his mouth, and on his tongue. He ran his hand through his long hair on the back of his hair and the other hand down on Sesshomaru's hard, wet dick, teasing it with little strokes and fingers on the tip, swirling circles on it.

He heard Sesshomaru whimper slightly, he didn't think it was entirely audible but he knew exactly what it was. He, Tony Stark made a Demon Lord whimper. He was the champ. He pulled him out of his kiss, looking him right in the eyes.

"You're mine." With a gliding hand he swept the worktable free of the screws, random bits, and pushed that outfit of his to the corner of the table. Sesshomaru had to know what was coming next. Tony fumbled in a lust fueled heady passion for the lube.

'This is all I wanted, all day, was just to get this. This horrible shitty day. I called it at disaster, I just didn't think Sailor Moon here would have been actively behind almost all of it.' Tony, try as he
might, tried to reignite the initial betrayal, the incendiary anger, the sandpaper grinding in his chest, but it didn't quite work. It tasted a little stale.

He'd fix that. He looked Sesshomaru directly in his gold eyes, slit pupils wide and slid his hands down from his tangled silver hair to his shoulders and with a shove bent him over the table, face down.

His hair fanned out to his sides and the bandage he had on his back had fallen off somewhere. He spotted the gnarled scar tissue on his back from the exit wound, like a knot on a strong tree they interrupted his otherwise flawless, magenta striped back. Tony didn't want to look at it. It didn't make any sense; it didn't belong there. He doubted the scar would stay, but it didn't matter. This isn't what he envisioned. It was ugly. He didn't do ugly. He took a large handful of his hair, noting dried blood still clung to it and covered his back with his hair.

"Now this is right." Tony lubed up his fingers and he slowly slid his hand over the left cheek of his ass. An ass, which magenta stripes almost reached, that would soon be his. He slid his other lubed hand down to Sesshomaru's length, pointing straight down to the floor and began to stroke up and down, feeling it throb at his touch.

Sesshomaru moaned and started to relax as he scissored his fingers deep inside him, every so often brushing past his prostate, achieving a hiss of a breath against fangs. Sesshomaru, propped up on his elbows low, closed his eyes, crimson covering gold as his blue youki trickled out.

It covered the floor as if he was standing in three inches of shimmering water. He added a third finger and he loosenend. Sesshomaru had to want it bad.

Tony's cock twitched up and he something almost gurgled deep in his groin. He had to put it in soon. He slapped his wet cock down on the crack of Sesshomaru's ass and he saw his legs spread in reaction.

'Christ. This is mine, this is happening.' Tony smiled wide in anticipation as he slowly slid his fingers out and lubed up his cock with another quick squirt. He put his head right at his lax entry, he had to tease him before he let him have it, before he showed this Demon Lord just what Tony Stark was all about. He slowly slid in his twitching cock and it was like lightning. His whole cock tingled, it had to be the youki.

"Oh yesss!" Tony gasped and moaned as he pushed full tilt into him. The muscles around his cock tightened. Damn, he is better than that one yoga chick who like invented kegels. He jaw unhinged and he went practically cross-eyed as his base hit his ass cheeks.

He bucked his hips back for another hard pound inward. Sesshomaru's talons scratched the metal worktable like in a horror movie. The next time he would do this; he would have to tie him up to not shred anything. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw the little droplets of glittering youki bounce and splash.

He reached around and wrangled Sesshomaru's dripping cock and began to twist and pump and he continued to fist his long hair to cover the scar. 'He is...damn everything I want. I want to own him completely. I need him to be mine. I want to...He is lava hot, he is velvet smooth, he is vice tight. He has to stay.' Tony would do almost anything to make him stay.

Tony's body bucked, tightened, flooded and then heightened to a youki fueled high. Within Sesshomaru, his groin warmed and prickled. He drank in Demon Lord before him, hair fanned, eyes closed, jaw loose. His bangs brushing against the table, breath fogging it, lips painted a forbidden shade of red, ass trembling.
He increased the pace which caused Sesshomaru's eyes to shoot wide open. Tony angled his hips to hit Sesshomaru's prostate, he wanted to hear the Demon Lord say his name. Spell it. Write it in cursive with his tongue on his lab table, on his chest. The Demon beneath him quivered and inhale, he must have found that spot.

"Oh gods, say my name." He rocked back and thrusted sharply forward again to hit it and was rewarded with a yip. He increased his irregular pace on his strokes on Sesshomaru's own erection.

He let the hair go and slapped the ass in front of him with a solid smack, leaving the hand there. He heard a bark and Sesshomaru's erection flicked, surged and dripped wet.

"Stark!" With that one syllable Tony's chest bloomed in euphoria, like when found the replacement for palladium. He just made this Demon Lord say his name, the powerful Lord of the West bent over his lab table, legs wide. His insides fluttered, he was so close.

"Yes!" He felt the warmth pool deep in his base, and with his jaw lax and one final, leg softening pound he let loose everything he had deep inside the flipped over Demon Lord. He only needed to give one last fondle and pump before Sesshomaru too spilled onto the blue glimmering floor with a low growl. Slowly he withdrew from the Demon Lord, feeling great. Sesshomaru slowly rose and straightened, as he flopped into his chair, feeling bone softening satisfied and spent.

'Oh man, he looks like a statue, like someone carved him, made him to be some Tony Stark Siren.' Tony, coming down off his frenzied high then noticed something peculiar.

'Didn't his youki swirl yesterday? Why is it just bouncing on the floor, like…rain off of metal? Wait.' Tony then looked to Sesshomaru, whose expression remained completely blank, as if he had just gone for a walk. Tony's gut sank and a cold wash of dread drilled deep in him, tearing him open.

'I never saw him smile, never saw any hint of it.' Tony's elation left him, his chest now ice cold.

'Wasn't that the original goal? The whole point of all of this? I've never used people. It's not about to start now. Not with him. Not with this insane creature that upended my life and made my skin tingle like it had never been alive before. Not this prissy Demon who sends me into orbit, teetering on a razorblade. Not this asshole who risked everything, including me practically sending his best friend to SHIELD Azkaban, just to honor the rule in my house. Yeah, he fucked up, but so have I.' Tony's throat closed with failure as Sesshomaru wordlessly gathered his clothes.

'He didn't even say one word except my name. I'll return the favor.' Tony clenched his fists in determination, he couldn't let him go. Not ever, not ever like this.

"Not so fast Sesshomaru." Tony found his voice as he saw Sesshomaru's ears prick up and he straightened from picking up his pants. His swollen lips, again parted slightly, those two soft anomalies on his otherwise crystal sharp face. His eyes glittered in the soft blue of the floor.

"...do you not consider my debt paid?" Sesshomaru asked blandly but Tony had never heard that uneven edge to his voice before, like he had just eaten spicy Mexican. Tony didn't want to play the question game anymore if it got him questions like these. Before even Tony knew what he was doing, he shot out of his chair, closed the gap and planted a sloppy kiss on the unsuspecting Demon Lord. It was all desperation, because he got the side of his mouth out of haste. Sesshomaru didn't respond, except dropping his pants.

"I didn't mean it like that, and you know that's not what...this is. I know your youki, I just created a damn proximity barrier with it. I can tell when you're hot and bothered and when you're just damn
bothered so sit down you sulky princess and prepare for another go." Tony tossed his head towards the chair and Sesshomaru's pupils sliced over to the youki on the floor. It was the very first time Sesshomaru ever left eye contact first.

"I don't leave unsatisfied lovers, especially someone like you. That definitely is a legacy I won't leave behind so I am personally going to blow your mind, maybe even a few times. Tony Stark special." He witnessed Sesshomaru's eyes widen, like he had no idea what he was talking about. He pulled him close, pulled him into him, biting, sucking, prowling, taunting. The Demon writhed a bit underneath him, talons grazed his back and a warm hand met the back of his head.

Tony's mouth glowed blue, and he grinned into the kiss as he the youki coursed through his veins like an avalanche. Tony, now hyper aware of his body, realized his dick now stood at attention like a bayonet. Sesshomaru's eyes glinted in hidden glee, and Tony grabbed his slim, muscled shoulders and spun him, planting him in the chair behind him.

He leaned over and grabbed his pointed chin and tilted it up, capturing him again.

"I'm going to fuck you so good you'll howl." Tony grinned and Sesshomaru's ears pricked up again. Tony reached back for the lube and instantly it was taken from him. He could get used to that, he hated being given things, so having someone like to take things off his hands was a welcome change of pace.

"...prove it." Sesshomaru's pupils dilated and his irises glowed, Was that another taunt? He stood over Sesshomaru, legs straddling him, Sesshomaru's hands slid up his legs like good silk. He gasped and shuddered at the simple caress on his tender inner thighs. How could the same hands, that decapitated an alien, cause him such a head rush?

Tony spasmed when the blunted tip of his talon and a tantalizing fingertip brushed a very private area. It previewed small hint of what was going to happen. Tony's lower body electrified in anticipation of something he didn't know he wanted. Tony never thought he would enjoy, let alone look forward catching, but Sesshomaru was an unintended exception.

Sesshomaru leaned forward sliding his index and middle finger deep inside him, while capturing the base of Tony's throat in what he could tell was some sort of biting, gnawing, grazing action. The fangs dragging on his throat with his tongue darting between them made his flight instincts redline like the tachometer in his Audi R8.

Tony's thoughts scrambled when Sesshomaru stuck another finger in, curving in towards his prostate, prodding it and Tony nearly came just then, eyebrows shooting up, mouth agape.

'Hold it together Tony, just start listing the elements, don't look at drop dead gorgeous Demon Lord you're about to practically impale yourself on...Hydrogen, Helium, Lithium...god he looks good for someone who got shot three times with poisoned bullets from a M24. Beryllium, Boron.'

"You're unreal, God you're..." Tony's breathless voice hitched as the fingers left him and he slowly, slowly, lowered down onto the Demon. No one could accuse Sesshomaru of compensating for anything with that Backstreet Boy sword of his, the guy could hit a ball off a tee with it. Damn another baseball reference. Tony's lips were surprisingly caught again by Sesshomaru's and another node of Youki turned his mouth blue, just like his arc reactor. Tony felt the initial pain and discomfort ebb.

"I'm something," Sesshomaru's mouth opened but no sound came out as Tony adjusted "else entirely." Sesshomaru, finally to Tony's smug satisfaction, quirked a corner of his mouth up slightly along with his ears. The shimmering youki on the floor rose like a tide, and playfully...
"No shit. You're my anomaly. Now, I'm gonna prove it." That was it. That's what he was. He was his anomaly. Sesshomaru's eyes widened and he blinked. He didn't see that coming.

Tony grabbed the lever on the chair, lowering it to gain more leverage as he began to ride Sesshomaru. Hard. Sesshomaru yelped showing his fangs which just made Tony go even harder and cry out himself.

Their skin slapped and he heard Sesshomaru growl, chest rumbling against him which made Tony tangled himself in him, pressing his own erection against him. Tony smirked against the kiss, enjoying that he could fuck him hard at his own pace. Rough was fun, Rough with a Demon Lord: sensational.

Round two was shaping up well. Real well.

Tony smiled, it coming naturally as he slammed down and rocked up. It was then, after they kissed again that Tony saw that the welt from the repulsor on Sesshomaru's chest had vanished, his skin now alabaster and smooth. He touched his chest on reflex where the wounds had been.

Sesshomaru, in response, began to pump on Tony's cock with hands slick.

"I will not die here." Tony jumped and Sesshomaru looked up through his eyelashes at him. The sentence caught Tony completely off guard, he paused mid descent, then decided to rise up again. Sesshomaru's hands shot to his hips, claws prickling his skin, helped power him up. Oh, he liked that.

"You're a mood killer gorgeous, we gotta work on your dirty talk." Tony responded wryly and Sesshomaru went back to pumping Tony's erection, forcing a guttural moan from Tony. Sesshomaru squirmed and his markings turned red. The youki started to explode around him like water bombs.

Tony savored being the one to bring Sesshomaru to such a raw peak. Sesshomaru trembled deep inside him and a warm, tight sensation filling him. Sesshomaru threw his head back, both of them aglow in blue, mouth that perfect oval Tony liked so much. He barked, or said Stark. One of the two, Tony couldn't be sure.

It didn't matter because Tony would deny it to anyone who asked, especially Bruce. But when Sesshomaru opened his eyes again, and he saw that small smile, a faint upward tilt of his lips, he didn't want to be with anyone else. He found that his own flushed cheeks rose into his eyes he came, and came hard all over the both of them, body bucking, throat garbling together incomprehensible syllables.

This stupid Demon was making him sentimental. Him! Tony Stark!

"Let's shower. I'll help you fix your hair; I know how vain you are." Tony winked, kissing him quick on his lips. Sesshomaru flicked his striped wrist and the youki as well as the mess they made disappeared in a swirl.

'Wait crap, did we just have make-up sex? I can't even remember if I have even had make up sex before.' Tony got up, pulse still racing. 'Shit. I don't have any idea what I'm doing.'

"I take pride in my appearance, no more than you." Sesshomaru rose, eyes glittering in humor. Tony noticed when his silver hair swished to the side, his back had healed just like his chest.

"There we go! That's what I like to see." Tony praised and Sesshomaru merely raised an eye brow.
"You have a positive effect on my youki. It allowed them to heal sooner than expected."
Sesshomaru educated and Tony turned his thumb up and towards his chest.

"Well of course. Your youki merely recognizes my brilliance, my stunning good looks, and how amazing I am in bed." Tony gestured to all of him and he swore he saw Sesshomaru roll his eyes.

"We have never coupled in your bed." Sesshomaru pointed out as they together put on their clothes. Well, what was left of them.

"Oh, you'll be introduced. I'll tie you down to the damn thing. You'll never leave it if I have any say so." Tony laughed and Sesshomaru's gaze narrowed as if attempting to discern if he was serious or not. He then just unspooled his whip and tied Tony's wrists together, flashing a fang.

"Bruce told me you could control your toxin, and I so called the bdsm thing day one. Oh, grab those extra hear ain'ts." Tony grabbed part of the whip examining it to try to see what it was made of, its tensile strength, flexibility. It was oddly smooth and had almost gel like texture. Before he knew it, the Demon Lord led him to his own shower.

"Did you just bind me and lead me to my own bathroom like a petting zoo llama?" Tony looked at Sesshomaru in disbelief and he merely flicked his wrist and the whip now pinned his arms to his sides.

"Ok. I'm oddly turned on, but I need my arms to shower, and I definitely need a shower after fucking you into my lab chair." Tony struggled against the glowing whip and it instantly vanished, Sesshomaru now nude, turned on the shower.

"I figured you for a bath guy, seeing as they didn't even have showers in your time, or like plumbing." Tony commented as his throat went dry watching Sesshomaru step under the stream, water running down his toned body in streams.

"I recall my past scry attempts when in still water." Sesshomaru explained shortly and Tony took off his shirt and pants and scrunched his face in confusion.

"What happens when you scry?" Tony boldly asked knowing how well the last time he spoke about his scrying went that night.

"My senses meld into one all-encompassing awareness. I drowned by many hands and become one with a great pool of Demon blood. I am then led to the Astral Plane by Bakusaiga. Tenseiga also assists." Tony had no idea what to do with that statement. He joined Sesshomaru, and true to his word, helped Sesshomaru shampoo hair as which was as long as he was tall.

"...Yeah, can't say I've been there. That explains your coagulated blood acid reflux on my roof. You haven't scryed it again since, well you know, right?" Tony asked cautiously, he asked Sesshomaru not to do it again at the bar the night before Loki left. Sesshomaru never promised him no.

"No. I must obtain an item my mother has in her possession. I will converse with her soon." Sesshomaru admitted, grabbing the soap and in return began to gingerly caress Tony with it.

"Your mother? She's alive?" Tony nearly slipped he was so shocked. She was alive and he is now just talking about her? He had almost gotten all the blood out of Sesshomaru's hair. He surprisingly enjoyed having Sesshomaru wash him.

'Oh wait. Is this...is this our pillow talk? Damnit. How did I let this happen? 'Operation: I swear he is just a fling', just officially self-destructed. We have gone way past that, I'm helping wash his hair
and it was even my idea! I'll just have to convince him to stay. Maybe I can bribe Loki with lime sherbet to break the Bifrost over Odin's head to keep him here or something.' Tony chuckled at his own joke.

"Not in this time. Bakusaiga says she seeks me; we will discuss our business in her tomb." Tony had no idea what to do with that statement either. He began to understand how Sesshomaru must feel whenever they talk about anything to do with the modern era.

"Loki said your mom wasn't around much. I can relate, my father was pretty absent, never congratulated me on anything, always in his shadow, trying to live up to his crazy expectations, continue his legacy. It wasn't until way after he died did I even think he cared about me, or liked me. My mom tried her best, but she was always distant, the parenting thing wasn't really her deal.” Tony found the words pouring out of his mouth before he knew what happened. He hadn't meant to make the conversation about him. Sesshomaru turned to him and tilted his head.

"...My mother rules...ruled her own sky kingdom...My father and mother mated for breeding purposes only. I was created out of a bargain, for the sole purpose of perfection. My father intended for me to unite and rule the four lands...nothing short of a successful conquest was acceptable. It is how I met Loki and Storm God. My father...believed me slow and...disfavored, he sought to...enhance my faculties by studying with them." Sesshomaru spoke slowly, and quietly, and Tony the awkward pauses indicated to Tony he probably didn't tell anyone about this, maybe not even Loki.

'Christ. Created? Well that explains his name. No pressure there, mom and dad.' Tony shampooed his own hair, finally done rinsing the suds from Sesshomaru's

"Your father sounds like the slow one. You're the fastest thing I've ever seen, and I'm not just talking about your gymnastics and 400-meter dash time. You're in a totally new space-time and within a week helped save the planet, bartered for ice cream, and bought Armani. You're every bit as bright as Loki, and hell evenly matched against Thor in a fight, he got in that first cheap shot with Mjolnir against you, I'll have Nat get him for that. And disfavored? You already know we all like you. Nirvana is playing on like every radio station, and half of New York left a bunch of flowers and bullshit outside my tower. Weird, pompous, and an asshole, yes. But slow and disfavored? Hell no. I would know; I am the stubborn, narcissistic, public icon you're fucking after all." Sesshomaru's eyes glowed and ears pricked up even with the water hitting them, his skin glistening, wet and enticing. Tony wanted to have him again, but he was too spent. He for once decided sleep was a good option.

"And at some point, you're going to have to tell me where you got that money. If you say you're working a corner I'm gonna have to get tested." Tony added and Sesshomaru recovered, resuming his typical neutral expression, finishing washing his own body, Tony ran his hand over the stripes that curved down his back, almost coming to a V shape on his back before flaring out the sides and ending near his pecs and sides.

"This Sesshomaru made a business arrangement with Polly and exchanged wares with a large, foul human." Sesshomaru explained, turning off the water, Tony's fingers still on his markings.

"I'm gonna have to meet Polly. So not cool Bruce met her first, he showed me the photo you guys took. He told me you call us all by which flavor of ice cream we like. God you're weird." Tony reached for a towel but a burst of youki dried them both before he could grab it. Sesshomaru turned, expression unreadable.

"...I refuse to change my behaviors to suit your human normalcy." Sesshomaru's voice sounded dark and foreboding and Tony fought a peel of laughter, which was the exact opposite of the reaction he wanted to convey to Sesshomaru. They went into his bedroom together. Together!
"Well, you're in good company. The Avengers are about the most abnormal group you'll ever find, and I definitely am the forerunner in the atypical department." Tony gestured to all of him as he flopped into bed. He knew why Sesshomaru said that particular statement but didn't feel like going there. Sesshomaru didn't say anything as he sat on bed moving the pillows aside and sliding up so his back rested against the head board.

"This Sesshomaru requires some rest." Tony looked up to the Demon Lord sitting on his bed, back against his head board. It was odd and distracting.

"Um, ok you know you lay down on beds, right?" Tony brought the sheets up to his hips, looking over at the Demon Lord who looked down on him, quite literally. Sesshomaru didn't look much like a cuddler, and that was fine by Tony because he didn't super enjoy it much either.

'He must think I am going to like, cling to him or something.' Tony waited for Sesshomaru's response.

"This Sesshomaru does not lie down." That got Tony's attention.

"What? What kind of statement is that?" Tony propped himself up, completely flabbergasted.

"...I was instructed at a young age that one must always be ready, even when resting." Tony laughed despite himself and sunk back down. Oh god, they were both so fucking up! His parents literally told him he couldn't lie down or something will kill him. Come to think of it, it did look really unnatural when Tony put him on the floor in the storage room, Jaken did move him.

"How bout that, your parents really did a number on you Sailor Moon." Tony was still laughing, and Sesshomaru's eyebrows furrowed together slightly. "I can't sleep with you like, sitting there like that. It's too weird. We got your barrier and Jarvis, I think you can rest easy." Sesshomaru, instead, rose, spotting an overstuffed armchair in the corner of the room. Tony knew he wasn't really leaving, but he found it really annoying that instead of trying to lay down he just went for the chair. Stubborn ass.

"You can put those sweatpants on if you want." Tony suggested instead of getting annoyed, they were red after all. They were the same ones he tried to pull on the night that Loki dropped in as his special guest. Sesshomaru eyed them, putting them on. They were way too short, showing the stripes on Sesshomaru's ankles.

"Why do you have so many damn stripes?" Tony murmured, more to himself, not expecting an answer. He was too damn tired.

"...I favor my mother's bloodline." Came Sesshomaru's eventual reply, and right after it Tony fell asleep.

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Oh shit, there is some nasty fucking water in my lungs; I can't breathe underwater! Someone is holding me here... and what the fuck language were they speaking this time?! Goddamn this fucking car battery! What the fuck is this all about?! I can't even breathe! Sesshomaru?

I can't do it. I won't. Fuck this. Fuck you, I'm Tony Stark!

I have to get out! Where am I? Pepper! Rhodes! The fucking funvee!

I can't move...damn. And his bald fat face?! Obediah! Fuck that guy!
I can't move my legs. I can't move my legs! I can't breathe. I can't believe that fucker Obediah. I have to get out.

The m24 sniper rifle fits a 7.62x51mm NATO cartridge, it has a 5-round internal magazine. Blitzen is the last reindeer. Sirius. Cerberus. Operation: Ultron. Astral Plane. Demon Lord. Why is there blood on the stage?! Goddamnit Steve your stupid face is stupid heavy.

Pepper give me the case!

I have to save Yinsen! His family, they're dead. He can't just run away and leave me stuck in this thing. There isn't enough ammo in that m24 carbine for a stand. Don't you hurt Pepper, she is the only family I have! I have to get out of this nasty fucking water.

WHERE IS MY SUIT?! JARVIS. I can't move my legs; I'm falling and I still need to stop Vanko! Son of a Bitch, I hate Justin Hammer! Space is awful! I can't move, Pepper isn't answering! Why does he have so many stripes?! What does true form mean?!

What the fuck is that blue light?!

You can't take him, this isn't his fight. He was dragged into this by Loki and he's stuck here. You aren't taking him from me. You can't take me either!


---

Tony shot up from his bed like he was spring-loaded. His body blazed out in a cold sweat, but he was burning up. His lungs didn't work, his chest clamped and he smacked his arc reactor three times. Ok it was still there. No car battery.

The twisted sheet tangled around his legs, binding them. That explained the leg thing. Tony immediately pulled his still tangled legs to his chest, eyes unfocused. His skin sticky in sweat even made the silk sheets tacky.


"Fuck this is…Fuck. Just fuck. OK. It's not Ok. Ok." Tony's thoughts blended and constricted, he couldn't move, he wouldn't. Could he scratch his hair? No, don't fucking chance it. Fucking Obediah. Fucking space. Fucking Afghanistan. Fucking sheets!

'Fuck. I got this. This is my tower. My rules. Jarvis would alarm if something was wrong. I can't believe SHIELD hacked Jarvis. Merlin? Blue Duck? what the blue fuck is that?! Oh shit. Jarvis. What if he is against me too? That stupid barrier would tell Sesshomaru something though. Shit. Wait, Sesshomaru.' Tony looked up jerkily, curled in the chair like a gargoyle, gold eyes glowing, sat Sesshomaru. Tony's thoughts froze then recoiled.

Sesshomaru simply watched him.

Pause.
"Say something!" Tony yelled. He couldn't just sit there and watch him wearing his fucking sweatpants in his chair! That was his stuff; this was his room! Who the hell let him in?!

"...it is 17th day of your solar month of April, of your human year 2015." Sesshomaru's deep voice held barely above a murmur. Why did he just tell him the date?! Human year?! Really?!

"Say something else." Tony didn't really demand, his voice got choked up. Sesshomaru's eyes never left him.

"...Once Loki and I challenged two phoenix Demons to duels. I won mine. The Demoness Loki fought called him Kiki. Loki became distracted allowing her a victory. They would encounter each other again and couple before she torched many of his possessions and left him." Tony rubbed his face. OK. He could rub his face. This was progress. He went to move his left leg, ok. Slowly. Yes. Ok now the right. Ok. Good. This was good. Whew, nothing bad happened.

"Kiki. Huh. I need to... Why did you tell me that?!" He didn't care about his stupid story, or his stupid treasure quests with Reindeer Games. Tony's chest cracked open, relieving the pressure. Oh, he wasn't shaking anymore. That was fast.

"..." Sesshomaru didn't answer and Tony didn't need him to. God this was so not badass.

'I had been doing so great too. I haven't had an attack for months. This is his fault.' Tony's eyes hardened at the dark Demon Lord in the corner. 'Stupid shooting. Stupid Demon Lord, this was all such a stupid fucking idea!' Tony felt a frustration boil in him as he glared over to Sesshomaru who still hadn't moved.

'This is too fucking close. He is too fucking close. I can't handle this. He is just going to leave, just like Yinsen. They bled the same damn color, even both their families are dead.' Tony's mind percolated with vindication.

"Get. Out." Tony's voice sounded like two bullets clipping. Sesshomaru simply stood, and completely vanished, as if he could also teleport. Tony sighed, he couldn't tell if he felt better or not. He grabbed his phone, it was 3:49am. He knew that time meant something, and the date meant something too, but he couldn't remember what.

He knew sleep would evade him. Eventually he called out to Jarvis.

"Jarvis bring up the past day's worth of conversations with Sesshomaru and Loki." Jarvis brought them up, first one being the one that occurred most recently: the one with Bruce, Natasha, and Loki explaining 'Operation: Sesshoki down'.

The only thing that stood out was the sentence Sesshomaru said: "He viewed it as a casual diversion. There was no sharing of quarters." Tony's tired mind spun. So, Sailor Moon saw what they had as just a fling too huh?

Jarvis showed the second conversation, before he and Sesshomaru had got hot and heavy in the Quinjet. and this one caused a coil of anger at Sesshomaru's words: "This Sesshomaru intends to seek no mate from this time.", "Perhaps I will turn my attentions to a certain Archer...slake his own earthly tastes.", "This is an exploratory coupling only," Tony felt his chest hitch, exploratory coupling? Was he just a practice guy for Clint? Was he really intent on leaving this time to go back to his own? He could be having an 'exploratory coupling' with Clint too...

'I'm a moron, I am getting so played, he is probably fucking Clint right now, or wants too. Fuck.' Exhausted, Tony took a couple Ambien finally fell back into a fitful sleep.
Chapter End Notes

Yikes! So Sorry to my faithful commenters kudosers(is that a word?) and followers for the delay! I made this one extra long for you guys! Poor Tony. Right when things start to go right for him, they just deviate don't they?!

Thank you for all your wonderful comments! :) They mean the world to me. Let me know how you liked this juggernaut of a chapter!

-TL
"You. With me. Now." Loki didn't wait for Sesshomaru's response as he grabbed the Demon Lord who just retreated from Stark's quarters as if electrocuted, and teleported them to the middle of Central Park. It was 3:58 am. Sesshomaru was late, and he was falling apart.

"...I am indecently dressed." Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes at him. It was then Loki noticed he indeed was wearing nothing but Stark's red sweatpants in the middle of the Bethesda Pavillion, where Sesshomaru fought the Chitauri. The brisk hair chilled Loki's skin, pricking it into bumps so Sesshomaru had to be none to pleased.

"Now who's 'bedclothes'?" Loki frantically smiled, trying to keep himself together as he curled together green sparkling wisps and magicked an oversized white Captain America T-shirt onto him. Sho did not look amused. Yet, Loki knew that Sesshomaru knew that he was at the end of his rope.

"...Loki..." Sesshomaru warned, ears lowering. And Loki got it, he really did.

"Sho, I had honest sexual relations with Clint." Loki confessed and Sesshomaru stared at him blankly. Oh of course he knew, damn his sense of smell! Why didn't he find him sooner then?!

"..." Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed, as if waiting for the issue. Loki licked his lips chuckling manically.

"This. Wasn't. Supposed. To. Happen. You! You and your meddling. The arrows, the ice cream, the dinner, the bar...don't give me that look, I know you tied yourself up with Stark, letting him chatter about some trivial nonsense leaving us alone to play billiards!" Loki paced, running his hands through his hair, trying to calm his erratic heartbeat. Loki knew he was sweating and wringing his hands again.

Clint liked him. Clint actually liked him. Clint wanted him. Clint said his name during intercourse. Clint washed up with him after. They...got steaks at that foolish steakhouse again, with his fake Midgardian currency of course. He was courting Clint, and properly.

By. The. Nines.

"You dare blame this Sesshomaru for the outcome of your own inclination? You placed another protection spell on him. You coupled in our quarters. You charmed him." Sesshomaru's eyes flashed with visible irritancy. Loki found it odd at how easily Sesshomaru lost his cool. Perhaps not all went well with Stark. He sensed his youki spark, he knew Sesshomaru liked to spark his youki when intimate. Most Demons did, he had first hand knowledge with that thrice damned Phoenix Demoness.

'I too should have known Sesshomaru would know about the protection spell I placed on Clint when I healed his shoulder.' Loki hoped he wouldn't mention it to Clint. He'd surely crack some issue with him not being a child.
"My flirtations are not the issue! He was never supposed to like me back! He was never supposed to forgive me! And he did, and he enjoys me, as me! I even tried to shift into some attractive Midgardian women and he denied it." Sesshomaru tilted his head to the side slightly and his ears pricked up. He put a curled index finger to his mouth, and Loki dare thought he was mocking him.

That was when Loki noticed something was amiss with Sho's markings. Loki squinted his eyes and his mouth fell open slightly. The markings on his triceps had turned crimson as well as his wrists.

"Forgiveness? For what and since when do you seek such a useless thing? I fail to see the issue." Sho sighed, well, it was a sigh for him. Loki didn't really listen to him though. Sho may not have noticed his markings, nor may know the significance behind this change, but Loki had a serious inkling. Sesshomaru had entered the beginnings of a mating ritual.

How…complicated. Of all the mortals, he chooses Stark. Of course, he would! He just had to make everything difficult.

At least Stark had honest sentiment towards him, Tenseiga would be reluctant for a mortal to wield him otherwise. Tenseiga was not intended for mortals. Loki quickly snapped out of it.

"It's a problem Sho! I don't know what to do, I can't handle this. I am no longer me; I am not a being he can be with." Loki's pulse started to race and Sesshomaru's lips thinned. Loki had no warning.

Sesshomaru punched him in the jaw with a sharp left hook.

Loki hit the dirt, sprawled out on his backside. What in the Norns?! He tongued a metallic taste in his mouth. Sesshomaru rarely resorted to punching.

"Loki. What do you want?" Sesshomaru's fangs lengthened, hair raised, patience reached. Loki swallowed, and stood back up.

Loki really didn't desire a spar with a worked up Sesshomaru, swords or no swords.

"I want him, but I don't want him to reciprocate. I can't elaborate. I don't even know precisely why I want him. His loyalty to me was false three years ago, all of it. His interactions with me during the invasion were forced. I know he didn't want to align with me. I know he wished to kill me. Yet it was the first time, in such a long, long time Sesshomaru that I found someone so… so unlike me and who…spoke to me like an equal. I played house, like a child. Now I am with him, now he looks upon me with such…ardor. Real, emotion. It doesn't seem possible. It's like I caught a comet in my hand. I can't hold onto it, I'll extinguish it." Loki babbled, pacing again in the park. He had no idea what to do next. He merely meant to satisfy Clint, like a transaction. Worship him a bit. Make him feel good, pay back a debt the only way he knew how. He hadn't expected anything like Clint wanting him back, to demand him.

"Your theatrics, God of Mischief, tire this Sesshomaru. Allow the archer to decide. I am leaving." Loki twitched, like it was that simple! Something was amiss with Sesshomaru. He used his title, not his name.

"What troubles you now? Did Stark say something to you?" Loki tried to make Sesshomaru turn around. He needed him to stay, so he changed the topic of conversation.

"Stark had a human night terror, much like Rin's. I believe I solved it incorrectly. He asked me to leave." Sho sounded pensive and looked over to the fountain. Loki chewed the inside of his cheek. As far as he knew, Sesshomaru had never dreamt. And, as far as Loki was privy, Stark had been
into the cold void of the Andromeda galaxy. He most likely had some mental scarring much like he had falling into Sanctuary.

"He most likely either wished for you not to see him in such a state, or was more mentally unsound than usual." Loki gesticulated spinning his finger around his temple and Sesshomaru's eyes sliced into razors. "I'm not implying he is deranged, well entirely deranged. He has seen the cosmos and annihilated The Mad Titan's primary armada first hand and nearly did not live to tell the tale. I am well aware of what that can do to a mind. He is most likely…still suffering from it in secrecy." Loki sighed through his nose. Of any issue for Sesshomaru to help with, this may be leagues of his depth. Sesshomaru could be too logical and sound for his own good.

"Know this, Sho. Stark is burdened with scars, most unseen. Typical logic and operations may not apply to his issues. He is not something broken to be fixed. He is who he is, and may just require someone to simply… help weather his madness." Loki may or may not have been still talking about Stark.

For all their differences, Thor and Sho both operated well within the realm of black and white and world view for every decision they made. Thor's exceptions were usually when he was rarely incredibly intoxicated and the Demon couldn't even get intoxicated for Norn's sake!

Sho's exceptions laid more in when his youki took over.

Clint most certainly had a strict moral code, as he had told Loki before, but operated more effectively than Sho and Thor in a world of gray.

Loki, along with Stark, both operated in a murky shade of gray, there wasn't a true good, nor a true evil. Not even the Mad Titan could be considered truly evil, just briskly ruthless, impossibly powerful, and with ambition tantamount to none. Anyone with access to that much power could be labeled the same.

He and Sesshomaru had certainly proven that to those weaker than them.

And Stark, while intelligent and powerful for a mortal, had his gray areas of weakness if his Midgardian spirit habit was any indicator.

Loki, selfishly, or perhaps not so selfishly, wished Stark would do something irrevocably against Sesshomaru's principles to cause him to lose interest. There was no way these two could possibly work. It was one thing for Sho to pursue him out of sport, another to start the mating process.

"…" Sesshomaru remained characteristically silent, but his eyes shifted a bit.

"What possible else could trouble you? I swear on Hela herself you sulk far more than I recall." Loki began to calm his nerves a bit, having something else to focus on.

"…My mother seeks me. It pertains to the scry. I may take Stark with me to her tomb." Sesshomaru stated flatly, too flatly. Loki's eyes lit up in recognition. Loki surmised he was attempting to downplay this decision. Loki knew exactly what it meant. Not even he had met his mysterious mother. Though she was apparently already dead, Loki had heard rumors that some Demons could retain their souls long after death. If he got his Astral Plane gift from his mother then this would make even more sense.

"You're going to introduce your intended to your mother? A bit soon, don't you think? Not even I have met her." Loki, for the first time sliced his mouth into a scythe of a smile which was double edged. He hinged the humor side Sesshomaru's way, but Loki knew deep down Sesshomaru
sounded serious. Sesshomaru in a flash had his whip drawn, fuming. Loki laughed darkly. Oh, and he had accused him of being dramatic?

"I agreed to take one of the humans with me if I were to leave this metropolis. Stark is capable of flight; it would be fastest. It would be him or Barton in the Quinjet. I would leave Rin with Romanoff for weapons training." Sesshomaru did not convince Loki whose smile only grew. Oh, kidnapping Sesshomaru and taking him to the park definitely made him feel better, in an unintended way.

'We are both in such a predicament. Sho likes an unstable mortal who cannot settle on one lover and doesn't even live in his time! I want a mortal who wants someone I am not anymore, yet I cannot tear myself away from. We are such selfish creatures, what is that saying here on Midgard? Oh, misery loves company.' Loki's emerald magic shot to his fingertips.

"You know very well another Avenger capable of flight. If I asked Thor I —" Sesshomaru had him by the throat with his whip, but there was no toxin applied to it, and minimum pressure constricted him. Quite unlike their first spar.

Loki still fake gagged and pulled at the familiar weapon.


"Not my brother, but let me know how that goes. Let's depart before someone sees us fighting. Before Lady Potts even intends us to be seen." The whip let up and Loki teleported them back into the main room of Stark tower. Loki magicked away the Captain America shirt before Sesshomaru could slice him with more than just a glare. He would magic it back on one day.

"Holding another 'schemers anonymous' meeting?" Loki whipped around to see Clint leaning over the kitchenette countertop. Loki's lips curled up in a response as automatic as a heart beating.

"I believe a once monthly meeting is sufficient." Loki cracked a saucy smirk to a sheet-creased Clint who sleepily smiled back, holding up one finger.

He ached to see more of those smiles before the Aethon reached them.

"Also, no shirt, no shoes, no service Fancy Pants, this isn't the beach. Were you going to get more seafood in those clam diggers you have on? Should I call you Fancy Capris now?" Clint pointed, eating what appeared to be a green apple and Loki swore Sho growled.

"…” Sesshomaru said nothing as his whip flashed out and just as quickly retracted. Loki had a hard time tracking the movements of the whip but he had a vague idea what he did.

The apple melted in Clint's hand.

"Hey, don't take your poor fashion choices out on me, Fancy Waders." Clint pouted and inadvertently yawned. Loki chuckled, he needed to ensure his mortal got proper sleep, and if any indication by Sho's short trigger, the irritable Demon needed rest as well.

"…Barton, Uncle Loki? Lord Sesshomaru! You're back and better!" Rin emerged sleepy eyed from the corridor and waved to Sesshomaru. Rin, unable to sleep with Sesshomaru out and injured, implored Clint and himself for a bedtime story and had fallen asleep in their quarters. Even that imp Jaken had followed.

If it had been any other mortal girl, Loki would have magicked her away to have his way with Clint
once more, but he couldn't bring him to do it to Rin. Also, due to Rin's stay he learned much about Clint's time in the Midgardian circus in the form of a rousing bedtime story.

"C'mon munchin, let's all go back to bed." Clint sighed and Sho's expression softened. Loki smirked knowingly when Sho followed them back to Clint's quarters. He had indeed grown less cold in the past half century or so. With Jaken asleep in the corner of the far room, Loki figured Sesshomaru would sleep elsewhere, but with a look from Rin that Clint had claimed was as manipulative as Loki himself could be, Sesshomaru sat at the very left edge of the bed with Rin sprawled sideways in his lap. Loki ensured that Clint softly snored on his belly before he curled himself into a tight ball he had been accustomed to sleeping in between the two men.

Loki's last thought before drifting off to a solid slumber was how odd they all must appear.

The morning went by uneventfully, but he had seen Jaken eyeing Sho's markings suspiciously just as he had the night before. Rin then informed she wished to go to Central Park and get more ice cream for everyone. While sweet, presented a few problems. Loki knew Sesshomaru would be immediately recognized. They had agreed with Lady Potts to wait till the press statement at five o'clock to be seen.

So, Loki decided to try to glamour Sesshomaru into a mortal. Loki was thunderstruck when Sesshomaru said yes, on one condition. He would have to remove his current facial markings to add his father's instead. Loki furrowed his eyebrows and agreed.

"I don't know why you would want your father's markings. They are hideous." Loki scrunched his nose. They lacked artistry and the purple was all wrong. Sesshomaru nodded slowly in agreement, looking at his reflection. Good. He didn't want Sho to start a pity party about his markings or whatever nonsense.

"Those were on your dad's face? Yikes, got lucky with yours." Clint emerged from the shower and Loki snapped his fingers and the purple towel that had been wrapped firmly around his waist slipped down a few inches and turned green.

"Hey! Not cool!" Clint warned and Loki donned a false, innocent smile. His magic would suffice to glamour Sesshomaru, but due to his youki being stronger than Jaken's he had to make the simple glamour, strong.

"Alright Sho, so I bet we can fool...Bedclothes, Banner, Stark, and perhaps Lady Potts. I think Romanoff will automatically know it's you, and Thor knows my magic and your youki signature too well to be fooled." Loki grinned in glee, looking into the bathroom mirror and Sesshomaru nodded, Rin stood beside them, bouncing in excitement. Jaken, now Jack, stood apprehensive.

"Yeah, you wont be able to fool Nat... Oh, give him Steve's hair! That will mess with him. Or Tony's goatee... maybe Nat's french manicure?" Clint tossed on some clothes and Loki did not miss spotting that taut, perky ass from his position. He had thought he hid himself, but little did he know he couldn't hide from him.

"This Sesshomaru's appearance is not for your amusement, Archer." Loki quirked an eyebrow at that name.

"Been, deregulated from my name to hobby huh? Who's wearing whose pants again?" Loki sliced a thin grin, he had pilfered a pair of sweatpants for Sesshomaru from Clint's closet. They fit Sho better and were black with some sort of Midgardian vehicle insignia emblazoned on them. Sesshomaru was not impressed and just barely tolerated them. He also had on an oversized white t-shirt with the same vehicle inked on them.
"I think the goatee will be overmuch." Loki's green eyes danced with magic as he started with the markings, removing them, including the crimson on his eyelids. He then shaded his skin color more tan and less porcelain white. Then, he turned Sesshomaru's pupils round, and his iris color into a typical mortal brown. Next, he rounded Sesshomaru's ears, dulled his talons to mere nails, blunted Sesshomaru's chin, and nose a hair, squaring them. Loki had almost forgotten about the fangs. Last was the hair. He went bold. He glamored it all off till it was short like Rogers', except he kept the bangs. Finally, he tuned it all a dark, jet black.

"Lord Sesshomaru! You look like how my older brother used to look!" Rin gasped and clapped with glee. Loki knew that if Rin approved, Sho would not alter anything.

And, of course, he did a perfect job disguising him just-so.

"So, you knew your family? I had an older brother too, can't say he looked anything like him though." That caused Loki to pause. Clint had been pretty tight lipped about his familiar relations, but Clint had told him his brother had taken his own life yesterday before they had sex. He didn't exactly know how to tackle that subject, or even if he should or could. Worthless, unworthy, burden, broken were feelings that ensnared his mind constantly. Clint's late brother, Nate, most likely felt the same, leaving Clint to clean up and move on. Yet, unlike Nate, he was truly all those things.

Loki, for all he wished couldn't really relate. He found Thor grating on his best day, and of course tried to kill him on his worst. Loki didn't do family. Clint would be quite disappointed to fully become aware of this.

"Yup, I did before they all were killed. My brother was really nice. He was a lot older than me and looked after us." Rin continued and gazed up at a now very human looking Sho. He himself would don his 'Yuki' form after the bets. He intended on going out with them. He wanted to meet this Polly and he had begun to go beyond stir crazy in the tower. Maybe due to a broody 'Storm God'.

Honestly, if he had really meant to kill Thor while creature shifted he wouldn't have retracted and bit his shoulder. He had simply been confused. Thor knew this. Thor knew how he would lose most of his rationality when shifted. He didn't understand why he took it so personally. Thor should have let it go and let him heal him, instead of humoring that insufferable Steve Rogers and 'Rhodey' with that Midgardian anti-venom. Both mortals thought he would back stab them if it suited his interests.

Which of course he would, but it ran counter to his interests at present.

"Mmm." Loki could tell Sesshomaru had a hard time getting used to the short hair, he ran his hand on the back of his neck and blinked. Then abruptly, as if he had seen enough, he stood and they all began to move to the main room from the bathroom.

"Lord Sesshomaru, I don't see why you feel the need to hide from these hu—" Sesshomaru knocked Jaken out with a fist slam to the crown of his head.

"Poor Jaken will never learn." Rin sighed. They made their way to the main room. It was early, they were the first there. Fortunate for their bet. Loki snuck a look at Sesshomaru, he had taken everything that made Sesshomaru stand out and normalized it. Sesshomaru, with his hair cut and blunted features, not only looked less intimidating, but also younger. He had done good work; no mortal would think he the same as the 'Mr Nirvana' they lauded so.

And with himself as 'Yuki', they'd almost pass as relations.
Yet Loki had been pleasantly surprised that a few mortals left messages for him outside the tower that weren't telling him to go to Midgardian 'hell and die'. It looked promising.

"Morning…oh wow the tech crew for the press interview definitely got here early. Hi, I'm Steve Rog—" Steve cut himself off when Sesshomaru leveled a purposeful, familiar stare his way. "Holy smokes you're human! Loki you did this? Wow, you look, uh, young!" Loki laughed, teeth flashing, they had no money riding on the bet, but it tickled him when his work managed to fool the ever-alert Steve Rogers.

They fooled Banner similarly. Thor was fooled into thinking Sesshomaru actually cut off his hair, which was a half victory. Clint, sitting next to Sho, motioned scissors with his fingers at Sho who just narrowed his eyes. He also didn't react negatively about Sesshomaru looking differently. Loki devilishly waited for Stark to awaken. His reaction, which Loki didn't tell Sesshomaru, could glean a lot from how they felt about the other.

Loki also glamored Sesshomaru for a third reason, it gave the mortals, and Thor, a game. Since tensions between the clucking hen-like mortals were still high from yesterday, they needed a distraction. Rogers, Banner and Clint dutifully gave nothing away when Romanoff entered the room. Yet, of course she wasn't fooled. She was, however, impressed and agreed Stark would be fooled and hit the roof.

How he felt about Clint eyeing him from the counter like a hunter made him want to take him back to his quarters and have him again. He restrained himself, which never worked well with Loki for long. Loki was not one for self-restraint. He planned on taking Barton again before the press statement but Fury had informed him and Romanoff they had to report to him today.

'I cannot wait to see what she makes Thor do as a part of their bet in the billiards game.' Loki sipped his coffee, a bad habit he had gotten into when Romanoff handed him the mug.

He didn't even like the drink, but the bitter taste grounded him. It reminded him the sweet times would be over soon.

He knew this, because while he didn't quite feel it acutely when he was in his serpentine form, the edges of his mind began to prickle. The Aethon was close, something had hastened the armada's pace from Loki's original estimate.

The swiftest in their fleet, the Aethon, was gaining. He was sure of it.

The Other had been overly successful in the research and application of his own magic to enhance the armada's speed.

"No, he will be at the Gala. Yes, really. No, he won't be making a statement. No, no press. As CEO it's my job to make sure that he is there. I have to go. Yes, bye." Lady Potts pulled him from his thoughts by sweeping through the room, presumably to awaken Stark. She didn't even notice Sho. She briefly waved to everyone and tapped something on her phone before disappearing into Stark's bedroom for around eleven minutes. He knew because he counted, as did probably everyone else aside from Rin, Sesshomaru and Jaken.

"I just don't see what the big deal is. It's just another snobbery kiss ass thing and you know the wind farm people give me the creeps. No one even likes Pittsburgh. Can't Rhodey just go for me like usual? Or you? You aren't wearing that perfume I don't like, are you? The Marc Jacobs?" Stark blew out of his room like a gale force wind, with Lady Potts following close behind. He was dressed in an exorbitantly expensive black pinstripe suit and yellow tie.
"Tony. You promised. The jet is fueled, you were due at it thirty minutes ago, and I have to help handle the press statement for Loki and Sesshomaru so no I can't go. Now please!" Lady Potts looked like she wanted to shove him but didn't. Stark flounced his way to the coffee maker, finding it in the middle of brewing another pot. Loki smirked at Romanoff knowing she gave him the last cup on purpose.

"Ok, fine. Going, I just gotta find Sailor Moon first and clear something up..." Stark smacked the coffee brewer lightly as if to make it work faster. "It's my tower, and yet I'm the one coffeeless. Who drank the last cup of coffee? Hey are you the guy here to deliver the Chicago Blackhawks Roomba team? Steve, did you let some teenager from 'Mr Clean delivery' drink my coffee?" Stark was still fastening his cufflinks when he finally looked up to take a look Lady Potts. Sesshomaru who had just turned around to face them, face impassive but brown eyes warm in amusement. Clint then took the opportunity, to flick a piece of bagel at Sesshomaru who dodged it and Sesshomaru, uncharacteristically, threw a sugar packet back at him hitting Clint in the chest. Children!

"Tony that's..." Lady Potts cleared her throat. "Sesshomaru. The Roombas arrive tomorrow; the logos you ordered were on backorder." Lady Potts explained and immediately received another phone call, leaving the room.

Stark slowly turned around and Loki bit out a laugh with Romanoff and Banner. Tony dropped his cufflink on the floor, eyebrows up, jaw open, brown eyes glued on Sesshomaru who simply stood there.

"...Not falling for that. You're all the worst for drinking my good coffee, especially you Reindeer Games, I bet you don't even do coffee. Please tell me he isn't a junior reporter. He isn't even dressed the part. He looks like he should be covering the fifteen and under X-games." Loki quirked his face at the last bit, and Clint bit a glared a bit in mock offense. Banner chuckled and Thor beamed knowingly.

"Hey, I don't dress that poorly. They're just a lil' big on him is all. Those red sweatpants Pepper got him last night were too short. Also, the roombas, great idea. Fancy Pants if I find another six-foot-long silver hair on my floor, sheets, bathroom, whatever, Rin isn't getting another bedtime story." Clint pointed, face scrunched in a scowl and Loki stilled.

Clint had no idea Stark was jealous of him. He also may have little idea that Stark fancied Sesshomaru deeply.

Loki edged a stare towards Stark, his gaze had blanked out into a thousand-yard stare. It then laserered over to Sesshomaru who impassively ran his hand on the back of his neck. Drumming his fingers on his thigh, Loki contemplated two options. One, he could clear up the clear misconception that Clint and Sesshomaru had been intimate. Two, he could let it play out and see what happened. It would be a good test for the two of them. And of course, plenty amusing for him.

"Oh, um, wow Moonie. Your hair's...different. Thought you said you'd keep your hair. And those were my swea...nevermind." Stark's taut voice stumbled along with his fingers, dropping a cufflink to the tile floor. The sound tinkled through the room. Stark didn't utter one sassy remark about Sesshomaru's haircut! He wasn't even trying, was Stark really the type to simply give up if challenged this indirectly for Sho's attentions?

Loki inwardly huffed; he wanted a more entertaining reaction than this.
As Stark bent down to search for what Loki had to assume was an audaciously luxurious platinum and yellow diamond cufflink, Sesshomaru's and Clint's sharp eyes locked onto it.

"It's under Ste-Rog-ve's-er's chair." Sho and Clint chorused at once.

"Nice spot." Steve admitted quickly, arching back to see the glinting trinket. Even he had missed it.

"...I see you're so close you're speaking in unison now. Well, it's showtime. Time to face the music. I told them band, not DJ, open bar, with good scotch this time, and ladies in the VIP instead of the windfarm people." Stark grinned, crouching low to retrieve the cufflink. Loki picked up, being the God of Lies after all, that the lightheartedness screamed forced. Stark didn't sound like himself, he sounded stiff, on edge.

"...what was it you wished to discuss with me, Stark?" Sesshomaru definitely still sounded like Sesshomaru, even though he looked fairly far from it. It was the first thing he had said all morning in front of the Avengers, he could tell some of them were a little spooked. Jaken becoming Jack was one transformation, Sesshomaru was another.

Tony's face darkened into a flush and Sesshomaru's expressive brown eyes furrowed slightly.

"Yeah, about that..." Stark tapped his arc reactor a few times with a frenzied flexing of his fingers. He was debating something.

"Tony. Jet. Now. I have six thousand other things to do besides force you in the limo with Happy." Lady Potts urged from somewhere out of sight and Stark pointed his finger between Sesshomaru and Lady Potts a few times.

"Convo's gotta wait Moonie. Daddy's gotta fly. Don't go anywhere and attack any star destroyers solo. Capiche?" Stark mustered a smile that he was sure Sesshomaru would even see was strained and turned and left the room with Lady Potts following, still chattering on the phone.

"I would never allow Son of Taisho to go into battle alone! I must obtain some of the glory!" Thor bellowed, and Sho glared at him, but with his current appearance it lacked a lot of heat.

Oh yes, like Sesshomaru, Demon Lord of the Western Lands, cared for anything like glory amongst the mortals.

"Clint. It's time we checked in with Fury too. Wheels up in ten." Loki flit his green eyes to Clint and caught his and like a panther he swayed to the right, lips curling upward. He mouthed the words 'later tonight, Clint.' And he reveled in his cheeks flushing a brilliant shade of magenta. Those words were, of course, a lie. Once Clint had left the kitchen to presumably go get ready to pilot the jet, Loki made an illusion of himself and teleported to Clint's bedroom.

He had Clint pinned to his bed by his wrists before he could utter one syllable of protest.

"You do not leave me for Fury without giving me some sort of reward. Do I make myself clear, Clint?" Loki pounced on his lips deftly, teasing his tongue into Clint's warm, inviting mouth.

Clint massaged his own lips back, and bit Loki's bottom lip and sucked it with fervor.

"Reward, huh? You think this isn't going to be some punishment for me too?" Loki's eyes lit up, piercing Clint's light brown ones. Punishment? So, Fury decided to punish him...

Obsidian and Green magic coiled out of his eyes and his mouth sliced into a wicked grin.
"If Fury intends to punish you, my wrath will know no bounds. Invasion or no invasion, I will raze SHIELD to the ground. I will plunder their bunke—" Loki hissed out and stopped as Clint started to chuckle a bit.

"No, no, that's not what I meant, you diva. I meant the meetings and debriefings will be tedious as all hell. Not to mention the spaceship they recovered from the harbor. Nothing like what you probably had spinning in your head. Besides, I'm a big boy. I can handle myself." Clint smiled reassuringly and Loki scanned his face for any signs of insincerity. He was telling the truth.

"Oh, but I'd much rather handle you, instead." Loki's voice curled in the air foreboding and promising. He possessed Clint's mouth with fervor and he could tell by Clint's squirming he wanted to get away.

But like was really going to let him get away.

"Loki… " Clint protested mildly as Loki shifted to biting and sucking all up and down his neck. "When Nat says ten, she really means eight." Clint moaned almost against his will when Loki clamped down on his earlobe.

"I don't care what that spider wants." Loki mostly lied as he magicked the buttons loose on his button up, and there went the belt, and his fly…

"Aww Glow Stick, you've hurt my feelings." A strikingly sarcastic and undoubtedly feminine voice rang from behind him. Loki's eyes flashed back from lust to agitated as he contemplated his options.

He could teleport her somewhere remote on Midgard, such like that dull desert out where mjolnir fell. He could silence her with a spell, or turn her…

"I know that look. You're scheming. Don't scheme against Nat. You owe her by the way, she's practically the only reason I cooled down yesterday." Clint pushed Loki off of him and Loki scowled. He hated being interrupted especially right before he got exactly what he wanted.

It was almost as if she had Odin's or Thor's sense of timing.

"I'd never dream of doing anything of the sort." Loki smiled innocently. Not innocently enough since Nat and Clint both snorted.

"Just because you stepped in and covered me from your Father's tantrum doesn't mean I don't think you're above your tricks." Nat chided and the color drained from his face like water off a window.

Asgard.

His heart skipped precisely three beats. He had nearly forgotten it.

"Yeah, Nat told me about that. She said you saved her and Rin, what happened?" Loki's hearing buzzed and he swore his temperature dropped. She told him about the throne room incident. Did she tell him about his Jotun form? About his disappearance with Rin?

NINES.

Did Rin tell Romanoff about the casket? The Tesseract?! Did she tell Sho about the Tesseract, the Casket? His Jotun skin? If she did, would he tell Stark? Clint?!

Why had he forgotten to go over this with him?! Did he make Rin promise not to tell anyone?! He
couldn't remember. Why had he let Romanoff live after seeing his true nature? Why did he not compulse Rin to silence?

Clint would find out. Clint would uncover everything. He would reject him, again.

'Just yesterday he said to me I was what Gods should be… now… now he is going to know that I am nothing but a fraud! A false idol! A monster!' Loki's mind spun and his magic gnawed like eels in his gut.

But… wasn't that what was supposed to happen? Wasn't he supposed to drive Clint away?

"Loki? Loki, hey you don't have to tell me. I know your dad went on the warpath. You don't have to relive it. Okay?" Clint swerved his head to be in full view of Loki's scattered stare. She didn't tell him. Not yet, anyway. He needed to speak to Rin. He couldn't for the life of him remember if he told her to not tell anyone what she saw.

She could tell Sho regardless; she was unerringly loyal to him.

"It was nothing, I assure you. I merely used Odin's unbridled rage as an excuse to test my newly found link to Yggdrasil. I used their moment of vulnerability to my advantage. They were pawns for me to use to counter Odin, nothing more." Loki's green eyes crystallized and Clint's eyebrows furrowed and he stepped back.

"What? You can't be serious, you love munchkin." Clint replied none-too-articulately.

"Love is for children, Clint." The words fell off Loki's tongue before he knew what he had said. So much for his silver tongue. Where had he heard that line before originally? He couldn't quite remember, but the scepter liked it and repeated it to him often.

Loki refused to look Clint in the eyes as he turned away. He had gone and done something right… hadn't he?

Then why did he want to slink into the shadows and his lungs snap with regret?

"Let's go Clint." Romanoff more suggested than commanded. He caught her sharp blue gaze before she turned. It was almost a look of pity if she hadn't looked so irate. Or maybe irate wasn't the correct word, maybe the spider was able to mask another emotion even he couldn't identify.

Loki teleported and luckily found Rin with Jaken alone in their quarters. Rin was drawing Sho's markings on Jaken (rather Jack's) face.

"Hello Uncle Loki! I think today I'm going to try cookie dough ice cream. Jaken said he wants coffee." Rin said, but didn't turn her head to face him.

"Rin, dearest, did you tell Sho about what happened in Asgard, specifically pertaining to my appearance?" Loki opened and Rin straightened.

"What Rin tells our Lord is between Rin and Lord Sesshomaru! Mind your own busi—" Loki spelled Jaken into a quick sleep and Rin whipped around, eyes wide in confusion. Loki knew he shouldn't have really done that, but this secret was important. He couldn't kill Rin out of good conscience, and he wasn't sure about Romanoff…but perhaps he could.

"Wow, I've never seen Jaken so still when sleeping. Will it hurt him? Does Lord Sesshomaru not know about your true form Uncle Loki?" Rin finished inking in the blue moon on his brow. It didn't occur to him that she would have assumed Sesshomaru already knew.
"No, and I wish to tell him myself when the time is right. Please keep this to yourself Rin." Loki ran his tongue along the roof of his mouth as if a chalky taste had dried it. Had he really just plead to a mortal child?

"Um, well, I guess it's ok for now." Rin bit her lip, face scrunched up examining him.

"Loki, what have you spelled onto my retainer?" Sesshomaru asked placidly and Loki jolted from having his full attention on Rin.

He locked eyes with Rin as he snapped his fingers and slowly Jaken awoke. He would have awoken later in any accord.

"Nothing, Sho, let's be off, unless of course you wish to mull over Stark's cryptic discussion topic more." Loki redirected effortlessly and again Sesshomaru glared, but it lacked its usual glacial intensity. Rin scrunched her lips into a frown, then brightened into a smile.

Loki went to the park with Sesshomaru, of course in disguise and they aroused no suspicions as Loki had predicted. They discussed upcoming battle strategies but Loki could tell Sesshomaru was indeed distracted. He couldn't place all the blame on Sho, for he too was distracted.

His thoughts orbited around a certain archer and when that blasted Fury would let him go.

The day went by fairly uneventfully. Loki enjoyed Polly. She was entertaining and liked to call Sesshomaru out on his nonsense. It was nice to have someone to team up with in the that regard. He also felt hope if this one mortal could like him, then perhaps the rest may come around.

He would not be getting a tattoo from her, however.

Rin, again, managed to get Lady Potts, Rogers, Thor, and Banner their favorite ice cream flavors.

The press statement, in which Loki only said the words "Thank you for your time, and we will continue to work with the Avengers to thwart the invasion." Sho said even less with "...". They were indeed was taking it seriously. Lady Potts nearly hugged Rogers it went so smoothly. He looked like he wouldn't have minded if she had. He and Lady Potts also decided to spend the day outside the tower.

The rest of the day Loki had spent mostly avoiding Thor getting him into a one-on-one conversation. Loki could sense he wanted to talk to him about some banal brotherly nonsense he had absolutely no interest in.

Loki, would never admit to being bored and would certainly never admit to phrasing something the wrong way. But… he itched for Clint to come back with Romanoff from their meeting. He had a slight pinch in his gut about how his last conversation with him went.

He was someone he treasured above all his other treasures, above perhaps everyone else. But. To love was a foolish endeavor he could not get behind, especially the way he was now.

Loki wasn't protective over many people. Sho to an extent yes, Thor supremely rarely, Clint however….

Loki's magic percolated through his fingers and arms at the thought of Fury. He would get his revenge in his own time and way against Fury for position he had put Sho into and what he subjected Clint to. It would be creative, fun, and perhaps a bit messy.

Loki internally debated asking Sho to scry Clint so he could teleport directly on his lap wearing
nothing but leather...but he doubted that would go over well. He was positively at wits end, at least until eleven that night. Because that's when Stark returned to the tower.

Early.

Sesshomaru had just ordered Jaken put Rin to sleep, where the imp too retired. Loki had successfully managed to use Sho as a buffer between him and Thor as to avoid being alone with his former relation.

Loki began to think Thor and Sesshomaru knew exactly what his tactic was.

Loki, Sesshomaru, and Rin witnessed Jaken defeat Thor five consecutive times in the video game Mario Kart. This surprised everyone, save Sesshomaru. He, along with Thor and Rin, assumed Jaken would be beaten soundly. Thor put the controller down like it let him down. Loki smirked, maybe he would have to try the game.

"Home sweet, home!" Loki heard Stark slur and about three things happened simultaneously.

One, he instantly recognized by Stark's swagger into the room that was incredibly intoxicated. He either must have continued to drink on his jet or gotten out of control at his gaudy Midgardian ball.

Two, that Sesshomaru's shimmering blue youki flared out like a shockwave, disrupting the drinks on the table. It began to spark red, and Tenseiga rattled and buzzed.

Three, that Loki noticed Sesshomaru's knuckles cracked and his eyes were pooling blood red.

"Thor restrain him now!" Loki shouted, voice high. Loki wanted to smack Stark, but, truly, he saw this coming. Stark did exactly what Loki knew Stark would do: he fornicated with another human, or at least dabbled in physicality with another.

And of course, Sesshomaru smelled the harlot on him.

Thor reacted a split second too late. Sesshomaru did have a natural speed advantage over Thor and Loki barely had enough time to teleport to see that Sesshomaru did indeed have Stark harshly by the neck in the air. Wonderful.

"To think I could have thought you were of sound honor and worthy of my fidelity!" Sho's bared fangs lengthened impossibly. Loki caught the raw emotion piercing Sho's voice like icicles.

Did Stark really have some sort of death wish?! Out of the corner of his eye he saw Thor hurl Mjolnir and Sesshomaru dropped Stark to dodge the hammer as it impaled itself deep in Stark's wall with a crunching of plaster. Stark crumpled to the ground coughing and Loki bent down to help him up and heal his bruising, bleeding throat. Though his talons broke his skin, no major nor internal damage was done.

'Sesshomaru must really like this one, he didn't even use his toxin.' Loki mused, smelling the scotch on Stark, his suit rumpled, tie loose. Stark stumbled up, swaying, eyes red and unbelievably, trying to say something. Loki wasted no time teleporting Stark to his quarters and dumping him on his bed. Loki sneered.

"You dull and wasteful mortal." Loki bit darkly. Stark didn't do anything wrong per-se, but it didn't mean Loki had to like it or him.

" Fuck that hurt. Damnit, it's not what you think!" Stark started but Loki didn't have the time nor the inclination to listen to him. He had to stop Thor and Sho from tearing each other apart.
"I'd stay here and out of Sho's way if I were you, Stark." Loki warned with a hiss and Stark instead leapt to his feet.

"Well, I'm not you and I—" Loki cut off Stark with a quick, but potent sleep spell, much like the one he spelled on Jaken earlier, and teleported back into the main room.

"Son of Taisho what possessed you to attack Man of Iron so?!" Thor had Sesshomaru pinned by his muscular forearm to the wall he threw Mjolnir into. Thor had a gash across his cheek and claw marks down his arm and across his chest, but no sign of toxin. Nothing life-threatening.

Sesshomaru had already regained composure, his shimmering youki had faded away and a bruise began to form on his left side of his face.

"Thor, he's fine. You can let him go. They had a misunderstanding." Loki explained vaguely and Loki turned to Sesshomaru, sighing. Great. No dirty sex for him tonight, even if Clint looked over his earlier outburst. It would be as Sesshomaru would put it 'unwise' to leave the Demon Lord to his own devices tonight.

'Well, a great spar will wear me out just as well.' Loki watched as Thor let up on Sesshomaru and he immediately pushed away from the wall that now had a sizeable dent.

Loki studied the sharp, icy look in Sesshomaru's eyes. He knew it well; it was the same gaze he had when he fought off those five Aesir long ago. His face looked impassive and as bored, but Loki knew it was a well perfected veil. Sesshomaru's rage was glacial and cold as Jotunheim could ever be.

Loki, this time instead of his daggers, conjured an ornate uru spear.

"I warned you, Sho." Loki teleported to the roof and it wasn't long after that Sesshomaru appeared Tenseiga drawn.

"My father's vices have become my own, it seems." he advanced, his ears low, as he sliced Tenseiga through the air in a horizontal strike, blue youki shimmering. Loki responded with a showy flourish of his spear and twining green magic. The weapons clashed and shrieked as their energies burst into teal.

Loki knew how to be an outlet for anger, yet he knew Sesshomaru wouldn't take his anger out on him maliciously. Sesshomaru twisted to the right and stabbed forward and Loki responded by using the spear's advantage of length and parried. He then came down in a great arc, almost clipping Sesshomaru's shoulder.

Sesshomaru acted a bit recklessly when angered, so Loki took advantage and sprung forward with another twirl of his spear and they continued. Loki's blood began to pump and his heart rate picked up.

They blurred in and out as flashes of a sword and strikes of a spear. Green magic bolts hit blue walls, dark genuine laughter flooded the spar and cold glares punctuated it. It had been far too long since Loki actually employed his jo-kata training. He let his experience and fervor for it show. Though he was much more adept at his daggers, he had practiced in secret with a spear.

He once thought he would need to once he held Gungnir and perched himself on the gilded throne of Asgard. What a misguided waste of time his training ended up being.

Loki could feel Thor's eyes drill into him the whole spar. Thor had never watched him and Sho spar in the past; he showed no desire to. He favored hunting, making merry, and fighting with the
Warriors Three and Sif. Sesshomaru certainly had no desire to spar with the 'Storm God's barbarian flatterers'.

Their spar was interrupted again by Romanoff and Clint returning, finding them on the roof. Sesshomaru turned to Loki after looking at Clint and Loki's eyes sharpened in recognition.

Sho wished to go see his mother tomorrow and wanted to ask Clint. What a horrid evening this turned out to be.

"Hey, what's up with the hole and dent in the wall? Thor, did you see another bee?" Clint asked, brown eyes warming Loki's skin but never reaching Loki's own eyes. Apprehensiveness and arousal coursed through his veins at the same time.

Thor was no idiot. He wasn't about to share what happened downstairs with the others with Sesshomaru present, nor before he had a better handle on it himself.

"Thor lost to Jaken in your Mario racing game more than a few times." Loki supplied and Romanoff eyed him, half believing him. It wasn't a lie.

"Barton, would you like to accompany me on a treasure quest tomorrow?" Sesshomaru's voice startled Loki somewhat, he had regained almost full composure. Clint's eyebrows went to his hairline and Loki chuckled. He hadn't seen that one coming. Loki gave Clint a warm smile and jutted his chin up in a 'go for it if you dare' gesture.

"Um…ok sure, where are we questing Fancy Pants?" Loki's cheeks flushed a bit at seeing Clint so surprised, and almost flattered.

"We may discuss the parameters of the quest now if you wish." Sesshomaru sheathed Tenseiga and walked calmly towards Clint, showing no sign of his inner turmoil.

"Yeah sure. Just don't make it too long, I'm beat." Clint ignored Loki, which he noticed. They made their way down and Romanoff approached casually, but with purpose. He conjured away the spear.

"Are you going to tell me what really happened downstairs?" Romanoff finally asked and Thor stood off to her side.

"I wouldn't worry about it; it's been resolved." Loki knew that Romanoff knew he was somewhat stretching the truth. Sesshomaru wouldn't attack Stark again yet the situation was far from resolved. Loki knew something significant had occurred between Stark and Sesshomaru for him to take this new inclination so seriously. Sesshomaru was not one to blindly assume things like fidelity.

"…alright Glow Stick, you may want to magic the hole away though." Romanoff finally responded and walked back inside leaving just him and a silent Thor.

"Brother..." Thor started and Loki sighed dramatically and rolled his eyes.

"Stark and Sesshomaru have been having relations. Sesshomaru, with all arrogance, most likely assumed Stark wouldn't pursue a mortal over a Demon Lord like himself. Stark, however, apparently did just that. Sesshomaru misunderstood their arrangement as one of exclusivity when clearly it wasn't and overreacted. Stark, technically, did nothing wrong; Sho won't lose face and attack him again." Loki explained quickly, fists clenched in anger as he too went inside to mend the hole. Loki hoped that was exactly what Thor wanted to hear.

"I see. You harbor anger towards Man of Iron though. It sounds like Son of Taisho is taken with
him." Thor poked the sore wound and Loki twisted his face into one of disgust as he mended the far wall.

"As Clint would put it…Stark isn't wrong, he is just an asshole." Loki stated with some venom, tongueing the unfamiliar word 'asshole'. Before Thor could say anything else, Loki decided he had enough of mortals and emotions and with a cloud of black and green magic he teleported to his secret cove.

After the demons disappeared from Midgard, Loki had constructed a small living space on Asgard, cloaked from Heimdall's gaze where he kept his few special belongings. Old spell books, scrolls, his spear, daggers, Odin's bow: Ichaival, and of course his most treasured, azure, possession. He also kept the treasures Sho and he found on their quests.

He had only remembered how to access it when he reconstructed his mind somewhat in the dungeons of Asgard.

Feeling nostalgic and in a rotten mood, he picked up the magic amplification crystal he and Sho acquired after defeating some Weasel Demons. He turned the round, green crystal in his hand warming it and it phosphoresced a deep purple. He sat down on the black bed in the middle of the room, a dark green blanket over it.

'We are both such a mess now. Really. It is good Sesshomaru and Clint will be gone tomorrow, it will give me time to think.' Loki drew some runes in the air, plotting and scheming with the crystal in hand. Loki hadn't intended on falling asleep yet the spar must have worn him out more than he thought, angry Demons, even when holding back were an energetic lot.

When he awoke, he teleported back into the tower refreshed, only to see Romanoff, Thor, Banner, Jaken, and a horridly hungover Stark at the counter. They didn't appear to be having a good breakfast. Loki knew he didn't sleep in late, so he was surprised to see Stark functioning so early.

Then he saw a scuttling vacuum robot, labeled 'Desjardins #11'. Ah, so Stark ended up talking to Clint about his Midgardian sport team, the NHL Chicago Blackhawks, and indeed purchased the cleaning robots.

"Good morning Glow Stick. Thor here sang like a canary right after you left." Loki rubbed a hand down his face. He should have foreseen that.

"Oh great. I bet you're going to harp and monologue about how even though I was nearly killed in my own house, that I should somehow feel guilty." Stark sounded muffled with his hand propping up his head on the counter and Loki scoffed and rolled his eyes.

"On the contrary, Sho overreacted; he should have never attacked you. I even warned him this would happen." Stark looked up in shock. Loki's lips thinned into a slight frown as he went to the kitchen to cook some breakfast. Maybe pancakes?

Loki truly wasn't lying when he said it was for the best things ended as they did. He slept on it. He came to the conclusion that Sesshomaru and Stark were not a good match. They were far too different and circumstances were strained and complicated at best. Sesshomaru would be better off finding a mate of his own kind in his own time.

It didn't mean he wouldn't make Stark realize what an opportunity he passed up.

"Wait, what exactly did you tell him about me?" Stark straightened back and Loki tilted his head and hummed.
"Something I don't do often: the truth. That you're a fickle, narcissistic, self-destructive, tramp."
Loki quipped, maybe with a shard of resentment, maybe not. Loki magically plucked the ingredients from the cabinets for pancakes. Maybe he would be lucky and blueberries would be left.

"Um. Harsh." Stark frowned, finger in the air.

"I don't know what my Lord saw in you! He was better off still hating your kind!" Jaken exploded and waddled over to the refrigerator, reading Loki's mind and retrieving blueberries.

"He hated humans?" Banner asked and Loki rolled his eyes to Thor.

"Aye, he was raised to hate and dislike anything that could weaken him, including humans and Half-Demons. Son of Taisho has matured surprisingly in that regard." Thor informed, now too interested in the pancakes.

"It takes a lot to get over ingrained indoctrination like that." Romanoff sounded like she was catching onto Loki's game as he buttered the now hot pan.

"Guess he never really got over it, since he nearly decapitated me before even listening to me." Stark white knuckled his coffee mug, something clearly angered him.

"As he should have! My Lord's judgment in taking a human as a mate is a valid sign he is still too young to take a mate at all." Loki’s eyes bugged out of his head while measuring the milk. Loki knew what Jaken said was truth, he hadn't expected the Water Demon to say it! The nines….

"Young? What do you mean? I heard he was around five hundred years old." Lady Potts, who had been apparently listening the whole time walked into the room, looking a little annoyed. Loki slipped into damage control. He knew the mortals wouldn't understand how Demonic aging worked.

"Sesshomaru is indeed almost five hundred human years old. What Jaken is referring to is his Demonic age. He is quite mature for his Demonic age; I wouldn't put much more thought to it." Loki attempted as he mixed the batter with extra force.

"Indeed! My Lord is just as strong, if not stronger than Inu No Taisho was and he isn't nearly fully grown!" Loki face palmed, Jaken had quite a mouth on him.

"Fully grown? What do you mean by that? How old is he really?" Lady Potts asked, but she wasn't the only one who sounded curious. Loki sighed, there was no getting out of it.

"Son of Taisho would be…nineteen by your mortal standards. A Demon year is around twenty-six of your human ones. Jaken is correct in that it would be early for him to settle on a mate, but he did seem taken with you, Man of Iron." Thor grinned out, shooting a look to Loki. Loki furrowed his eyebrows as he poured the batter into the pan. Pause.

"You mean ninety right? Like ninety, ninety-one." Stark sounded a bit surprised and Romanoff's blue eyes sparked.

"Oh no, nineteen as in about to be twenty. The story we told you about, when his father passed, he was around seventeen." Thor explained and Loki let that sink into Stark and the rest. Loki resented having to help tell that particular tale. Sesshomaru refused his help during that time. That didn't mean that he didn't take out most of the Northern Land's sorcerers in secret, however.
"That explains his invincibility complex." Romanoff pointed to Loki. Loki flipped his pancakes. Reveling in the ghosted look on Stark's face.

"It explains the Nirvana too; I think it's a rite of passage for every teenager to have a grunge phase." Banner agreed, chuckling.

"Oh. My. God. I chewed out a single teen father! I am one of those people! Tony, we talked about this! He isn't even old enough to drink! And we shot him? He's a kid!" Lady Potts shook her hands in horror.

"Whoa. If anyone here is a cradle robber it's him! He is 493 years old." Stark defended, though a flash of amusement on his face seeing Miss Potts react.

"Sounds more like nineteen with 474 years of experience." Romanoff waggled her eyebrows and Banner chuckled. Stark rolled his eyes and then turned to Loki.

"Who's nineteen with 474 years of experience?" Rogers walked in, all muscle, apparently just getting back from a workout of some sort. Loki plated the first of the blueberry pancakes.

"Pretty Boy. Isn't even fully grown apparently." Romanoff took a sip from her coffee letting the news sink into Rogers. Instead of freaking out like the rest he turned to Loki.

"Explains you then." Rogers pointed a finger at Loki as he started the next batch of pancakes with a whirl of green magic. "Sesshoki. You're his big protective older brother." Loki could see the attention from Stark and he wasn't going to let him off the hook so easily.

"I wouldn't overanalyze what our friendship is or isn't. What I can say is that Sesshomaru's attentions do not come easily." Loki flipped the second batch of blueberry pancakes magicking the plate to the counter and one down to Jaken.

"Yeah. I can say so. It's why he is off with Legolas 'treasure questing'." Stark shot back and Loki straightened tilting his head in visible confusion.

"He only took Clint because of that asinine request you made of him to take one of you 'lost creatures' when he leaves this city." Loki felt a certain pang of irony coupled with an equally strong pang of sexual frustration and awkwardness. Loki had half a mind to teleport to them but Sesshomaru needed space and someone who couldn't read him as well as he could.

"Are you sure it wasn't to have some more hanky-panky while playing Tomb Raider?" Stark quipped. Sho told him about his mother and her tomb? Loki nearly dropped the spatula and Banner face palmed. Romanoff pursed her lips.

"Don't be ridiculous! My Lord has not, and will not couple with that Archer." Jaken ate his blueberry pancake with glee, avoiding an encroaching 'Patrick Kane #88' cleaning robot.

"You're blind, bald, and short, Frogger. That's unfortunate combo for the ladies. He was wearing Clint's clothes yesterday; his hair was in his bed. He also opened up to him and Clint made him laugh. Laugh! I watched your conversation, the one you four had the other night, the spar, Operation Sesshoki down? He even confirmed what he had was just a casual fling. You know, the kind he attacked me for last night. Hypocrite." Stark counted with his fingers and Loki couldn't help but laugh heartily. Stark had indeed been looking for any reason for their whole arrangement to fail.

Pause.
"Tony, do you really think that Clint would sleep with someone he calls Fancy Pants? Oh, and check the pronoun use on the 'Operation: Sesshoki down' video. He said 'he' not 'we', master spy." Romanoff's face had flushed to a rare shade of pink from entertainment. Loki, still laughing, ignored the stares from Rogers and his brother.

"Um…well. Sailor Moon also said, in the conversation with Bambi over there before they sparred, that he would go after Legolas." Stark spat and Loki's jaw dropped. That swipe was meant to provoke his own jealousy, not to imply he was serious about Clint.

"That miserable Magic God is coupling with the Archer. He didn't even ask my Lord before using our quarters! Such rudeness. Humans in this era are so unobservant! You'd be Demon Fodder back in my time." Jaken levelled a glare up to Loki who finally was getting his laughing fit under control. Loki's smile was all teeth when he finally looked back to Stark.

"His remark about having an interest in Clint was to provoke my jealousy because I provoked his in you! I am having relations with Clint. He practiced archery with Clint as a favor for me. Last night, Rin wouldn't sleep without her Lord present so she slept in his quarters where Sesshomaru returned to as well. Dog Demons are obsessively loyal, and monogamous." Loki's eyes took on a 'challenge me' glow and Stark's eyebrows shot up.

"Brother, you and Hawk's Eye are together?!!" Thor looked like was chewing over it and Loki nodded, still smiling.

"You know Tony, for a genius you can't read people well. Glow Stick has been on Clint since he arrived. Pretty Boy even got them both green ice cream." Romanoff got up to get pancakes.

Stark looked to Banner and Banner sighed.

"I hate being in the middle of this stuff but they're right. Sesshomaru even helped set them up."

Banner backed up as if that's the only thing he wanted to contribute.

"What!? When did all start to happen?! This can't be good fo—" Rogers was cut off by Romanoff handing him a couple of pancakes.

"Him having sex with Clint or not doesn't change anything. You two were ill-suited, practically night and day. It's for the best whatever you had ended early. Especially since he advised me he wished to take you to his meet his mother over Clint." Loki finished up the rest of the pancakes, platting them with a swirl of magic on the counter. Loki's smirk was all dark magic as Stark hid behind his coffee in thought.

"Hmph, them being ill-suited didn't prevent his markings from changing!" Jaken tutted and Stark rubbed the back of his neck. Loki studied the inventor, he wasn't reacting the way Loki anticipated.

"Nothing even happened. She came on to me, hell she was all over me, and the thanks I get for turning her down and going home is getting strangled, again. Last time that will happen." Stark muttered, pushing himself away from the counter and Loki's mood soured despite himself. So, he hadn't fornicated with another human, he instead spurned an unwanted advance. That was what Stark meant last night when he said it wasn't what he thought.

"Ah, then it should be easy to straighten out your misunderstanding with Son of Taisho then!" Thor snapped out of his stupor and Loki thinned his lips. He doubted it would be that easy, and doubted that they should.

"Um….what point of 'strangled again' doesn't click with you, Point Break?" Stark dead-panned.
"What!? Tony? Someone came onto you and you turned them down? So, you didn't take her back to the jet?" Lady Potts accepted pancakes that Romanoff handed her.

"No, I didn't take her back to the jet. For the record, I don't do that at every gala." Stark explained running a hand down his goatee. Well, it still didn't change anything. They were still as ill-suited as a Dark Elf and a Vanir.

Romanoff abruptly reached in her pocket.

"Speaking of jets…Hey, did Pretty Boy crash the Quinjet yet?" Romanoff answered her phone which got a lot of glances her way including Stark's. One of the cleaning robots hit Stark's feet and he didn't even react.

"Oh really? Piloting better than that one recruit with the hair?" Romanoff provoked and curiosity won out across the room. Pepper leaned back, eyes wide.

'That clever dog. He learned how to pilot the Quinjet. I guess the phrase on Midgard is incorrect, you can teach an old dog new tricks.' Loki bit into his own pancake, sliding two to Stark on a plate, monitoring Stark's floored expression. A peace offering.

"Is he...is Sesshomaru piloting the Quinjet with Clint?!" Rogers stammered out and Loki quirked another grin, eating his pancake. He knew that Sesshomaru was up to something with those technical documents he was reading at night, but he didn't think it was that.

"Yeah. He read the manuals…No, that was Steve. You owe me that one hundred dollars by the way…oh you know? Ok—" Romanoff stated completely nonchalant and got cut off by Stark asking Jarvis to put the conversation on holovideo.

Loki grinned ear to ear as the video of Clint and Sesshomaru, in his complete traditional attire came up. Sesshomaru held the controls and was checking a few gauges looking serene.

"We're going to the Bonneville Salt Flats and we're going to race motorcycles, Ducatis! I already called it in! Apparently Fancy Pants hates cars." Clint gave an excited thumbs-up into the camera mounted in the Quinjet and Sesshomaru, bored, merely glanced towards it. Loki laughed again, Stark looked like he saw someone steal one of his battle suits.

"Sounds good. Report back in when you're wheels up en-route to the tower. Out." Romanoff sounded off and Loki heard a Roger from Clint and a quick wink and the image faded. Loki knew exactly who that wink was for. He leaned back against the kitchen counter and chuckled at nothing but air.

"Manuals? To fly the Quinjet? How did he know about those? Who gave those to him?" Stark asked to no one in particular and Jarvis answered.

"I did sir. You stated when they arrived initially you would supply them manuals so when Lord Sesshomaru asked for some for piloting the Quinjet I obliged. I would have thought you'd expect him to ask for them." Jarvis supplied and Loki swore he thought the AI sounded cheeky.

"Natasha, Rin is ready for training!" Rin flew into the room, dressed in athletic shorts clearly too large for her and an oversized 'Powerpuff girls' T shirt, clearly Romanoff's. Romanoff took a last bite of her pancake.

"Good. Let's go shrimp. I promised your Demon dad you'd be a sharpshooter in no time." Romanoff stood up and Rin cartwheeled towards the elevator.
"Wait, did you just make pancakes in my kitchen? There isn't anything in these is there?" Stark asked, finally taking a bite. Loki flicked his fingers and the dishes and pan were cleaned instantly. Loki smiled crookedly, it had been the most entertaining morning.

"Yes, and no. I do recall you advising me I didn't need to fear poison in your food, likewise Stark."

Loki's green eyes glowed in amusement, eating his own pancakes.

"This is all too much. I'm going into work. I'll talk to you later Tony." Lady Potts put down her plate, stress and confusion eating away at her appetite. Rogers straightened.

"I'll walk with you." Rogers offered and Loki drummed his fingers on the counter, mortals were most amusing.

"Brother…" Loki turned to Thor, not expecting him to address him. "I would like to spar with you today." Loki choked on his pancake.

"I think I'll pass. I can think of many other ways to spend my day than being humiliated, and if I wanted that it'd be far quicker to provoke Banner there." Loki recovered, banging on his chest to stop choking. Thor wanting to spar with him? With mjolnir? What had he done to anger him so?! Loki thought he'd be settled down from the whole sniping scheme by now.

"Please, just leave me out of all of this. In fact, I think I'm going to go on a walk." Banner retreated, leaving just him, Stark, and Thor in the kitchen.

"I saw you spar Son of Taisho with your spear. The passion and skill with which you fought with him greatly exceeded our own fight when you wielded Gungnir on the bifrost. I wish for you to spar with me with the same intensity." Thor sounded serious and Loki put his hand to his forehead. That fight was a lifetime ago, how did he remember it?

"Thor, it's not the same. Sho and I have sparred like that countless times." Loki huffed and finished his pancakes, levitating the plate and cleaning it. Loki went to leave the room but Thor stepped in front of him.

"You claimed the other day that I did not like you as you. Not only are you wrong, but you do not make it easy to know the real you, brother. I dislike this rift that has grown between us. I want to enjoy the bond that you and Son of Taisho share, that we once did. Spar with me." Loki dramatically rolled his head on his shoulders. He hadn't expected Thor to suddenly give a damn about his friendship with Sho, nor what he said the other day, much less feel envy over it. Thor must really want to get back at him.

Loki decided there was no getting out of it, Thor could be quite dedicated. Loki weighed his options and decided to get the eminent defeat over with. Loki's eyes dimmed and he summoned his spear, shoulders already slumped. He quickly teleported them to the gym where he and Clint sparred.

"Alright Thor, let us proceed." Loki frowned, holding his spear in front of him vertically with one hand.

Thor tossed Mjolnir in his hand and with a ripple of triceps and a streak of blond hair he charged forward. Loki pursed his lips parrying the blow just barely Mjolnir clanging off the spear with an almost musical note.

Loki struggled to care.

He and Thor were simply too mismatched. Loki had no idea how Sesshomaru managed to go even
with Thor in those melee fights, he must have used every scrap of wit at his disposal.

Perhaps he could just fake an unintentional opening, have Thor take it, and be done. It would be so much easier than trying to salvage any of what they used to have.

Loki dodged another blow and spun his spear out horizontally, point catching nothing. He reversed his stance and struck out with the butt of his spear at Thor's back, knowing he'd simply turn and hit him with Mjolnir with a horizontal blow in the side, ending it.

Instead Thor took the blow on the back on purpose, staggering a bit and turning to face him, face dark.

"You're not even trying brother. Why are you so afraid to succeed here?" Loki's eyes narrowed. What in the nines is he blabbering about now?!

"Succeed? In a spar against you? Please Thor, I think we know who the greater warrior is." A dart of anger quickened Loki's pulse and he whirled around spear extending fully out, almost clipping Thor in surprise.

"No. In giving our brotherhood a chance!" Thor retaliated by throwing Mjolnir and Loki quickly teleported behind Thor drawing back his spear to bring it down upon Thor's head in an orbiting sweep. Thor twirled out of the way, aiming a roundhouse kick to Loki's side which Loki blocked by bringing up his spear at the last second.

'How dare he?! How dare Thor now want to resurrect our bond?! What right? What right does he have to ask that of me?!' Thorns spiked through Loki's bloodstream. His magic jittered inside of him like static.

"We. Are. Not. Brothers. We aren't by blood, and we aren't even by name any longer!" Loki yelled as his green magic gushed onto the floor, spinning his spear all around him and in a fancy, well-practiced attack brought the spear down upon the retrieved Mjolnir, sparks shooting.

"You and Son of Taisho are not brothers by blood nor name yet you claimed Lady Rin as your niece! Steve Rogers was correct; you have always seen him as a younger brother. You treat him as your brother more than I, and we were raised together! You have given up on us!" Thor thundered and pushed back against the deadlock, causing Loki to backflip and hastily gain his footing to bring his spear up in another defensive parry.

Loki saw red.

'Now. Now he cares. Now he wants to fight for us.' Loki teleported next to Thor and with a flip of a spear brought the spear down on Thor's left arm. Thor responded with swinging his right leg over the spear and swinging down with an overhead strike with Mjolnir to hit Loki on his shoulder. Loki dropped to the floor in a crouch and brought the spear up to block.

"I see. You only care if you think you have competition! You, heir to the Throne of Asgard, defender of Midgard, jealous of a surly Demon! What of the three years I spent in your prison?! Where was your effort then? Where was your professed brotherly bond when my laughter finally stopped to echo down your marbled halls? When they silenced me, when you silenced me?!” Loki’s magic erupted and his spear now absorbed his magic and glowed a luminescent green. He flashed out, twisting counterclockwise thrusting the spear forward, forcing Thor to take the blow with Mjolnir at an awkward angle.

"You already know I regret that! It is unfair to continuously throw it in my face so. I may be
somewhat jealous, but it has little to do with that. We have a second chance and you let Son of Taisho in, and keep me out while scorning me for it!" Thor attacked back, barely managing to regain a proper stance and hammering forward with a short-range burst with Mjolnir which was met with an abnormally strong magic cancelling wave.

'I don't want Thor to incite such emotions in me ever again. To make me believe that the brother I once grew up idolizing, emulating, striving to be could ever see me. I am too far spent, too far damaged, too far gone. There isn't any point anymore.' Loki was on the edge of calamity and he could feel his mind begin to split.

And that's why Loki couldn't pretend with Thor. With Sesshomaru, yes, because they had shared life and death scenarios together and both came out on top. With Clint, yes, because all he wanted was for him to be happy before he accomplished his goal and snuffed himself out. Not with Thor. Thor would never get it because Thor wanted everything and didn't know how to deal with settling for less. Loki couldn't be Thor's pet project; his little sculpture he could mold into what was convenient.

"You have everything!" Loki shrieked. "You are Asgard's heir! You are Midgard's hero! You weild Mjolnir! Your destiny is in your hands and you have everyone's accolades and love so why can't you be satisfied?! Why can't you leave me alone?! What else could you possibly want from me?! I have nothing else to give you!" Loki finally detonated. He finally let his face twist into the grimace of anguish that coursed deep inside him.

He swung hard and without hesitation at Thor with his magic charged uru spear he created long, long ago. Long before Thor cared about Loki's weapons training, but not before he almost saw Sho get killed by the uru dragon. Loki's eyes saw nothing but a target. A target painted red.

'Why can't Thor just be happy, like Odin wished I could make him be? Why was Thor, practically everyone, always unsatisfied no matter what I do? Why did Thor jet his blue eyes into mine in alarm when my spear sliced into his arm? Why couldn't Thor just accept that we were never meant to be? That we were just too different! Thor was what everyone wanted, but I was who everyone called when times turned dark?' Loki didn't notice the liquid prick in his eyes until he saw the blood pool on Thor's arm and a wave of self-revulsion instantly sloshed in his gut.

He didn't want to hurt Thor anymore. Sure in the past he enjoyed seeing him suffer for his mistakes and his naivety, but that was so long ago. Yet, his emotions surged supreme and he cut his brother with his spear. He now was meant for nothing but destruction, a broken blade, just like the Other intended.

Collapsing to the floor, Loki magicked the spear away. He had nothing else to say. He didn't even know he had that much to say in the first place. He huddled into a ball and his breathing and his chest heaved too erratically to do much else except constrict.

Pause.

Loki had almost nothing, except Sho's regard and Clint's attention. He couldn't compete with what Thor had, but he wouldn't relinquish the little he had left. Trapped and scared and the only reason he didn't teleport away was because in the back of his mind, he knew Sesshomaru would feel it unwise.

Loki knew Thor was above him, hawking over him per usual and Loki didn't have the strength to tell him to fuck off.

"You already answered your own question Loki. I care not for Asgard's throne, nor Midgard's
praises if it leaves me without you. You are my brother, and always will be. I can see Son of Taisho like one too, you must remember those damned Scorpion Demons. But please brother, please don't shut me out. I want to comprehend you. I've sorely missed you, and I want you beside me, we are equals. I don't want us to be alone, together." Loki could feel Thor right above him, his blond hair mingling with his dark brown strands. Of course, he remembered the Scorpion Demons, it was the last memory he kept from the Other.

He didn't get it. Not at all. Why did Thor persist so much now? Why couldn't Thor see him as the broken, throttled down being he was now? He was useless. Didn't he see it was much too late? That he was already very dead?

Yet Loki's chest, much against his will, lurched and a strangled cry almost jettisoned from his lips. He never wanted any of this to happen. He never wanted Thor's devotion. Never wanted Thor to see him like this. He was supposed to be the strong one, supposed to support Thor, to be he his shadow. Not this reforged crumpled mass of broken magic and bits of soul. Loki, bereft, had nothing left to offer Thor. Failure flooded his mind into an anxious, crushing void. Loki wanted to disappear.

Countless moments passed.

"Loki. Loki. Speak! It is your gift, please… I can't stand your silence. Regale me with a story, at my own expense, if anything." Loki almost laughed. After all of this, Thor wanted a story? Loki knew he couldn't give him that. Loki, slowly, tilted his head up, catching the soft blue eyed gaze of his brother. He didn't know what to do, and he didn't know why his cheeks were wet, and his body trembled. His magic coiled around him like vines and he couldn't move. Not yet.

"Do you… do you remember when… you first met Sho?" Loki, ever so slowly asked, and Thor nodded and smiled, bringing Loki into a sweaty embrace he forgot he wanted.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry again for the wait on this one, having some health issues and having a lot of work has hampered me cranking out the chapters like I used to. Thank you all for all your continued support, it truly means a lot to me! Please let me know what you think, I tried to do all the characters their due justice :)

-TL
Clint was in a foul mood that was actually beginning to get better, much to his initial skepticism. He really had only agreed to go with Fancy Pants on his ridiculous 'quest' to get some much needed space or perspective or a goddamn distraction from Loki.

He had no idea what to do with the God of thievery, dramatics, and apparently sex. Clint had been scheming, well as much scheming as someone like him really did, while trapped in endless meetings at the temporary SHIELD headquarters about how to get him back for what he did to him in his bedroom and later in the shower.

"So since you can't seem to keep your hands off me, and you are so the type to throw a tantrum or sulk if you don't get what you want, I'm going to assume this wasn't a one-time thing," Clint squirted his 'arctic blast' scented body wash on Loki's chest in the shape of an 's' like Superman. Loki currently was running his long fair fingers along Clint's wet torso, travelling south. "I do not sulk." Loki twisted his lips into a pensive pout. "Who is the one treating the other as a child now?" Loki tsked, drawing runes on Clint's skin, they lingered on his skin as luminescent tattoos before fading.

"Oh, no you are not spinning that mess back on me. You literally cleaned ice cream off my hand; this is me being truthful. I'm asking because I had fun, and if you want to continue it, I'd be down." Clint wrote 'Diva' on Loki's chest in suds and Loki went under the water to rinse the offensive word off. He hoped he came across as casual as he wanted when he said that. He didn't want to appear desperate or needy for it to happen again.

"Oh Clint, you need not ask such from me. I intend on having you...I will admit I am by nature a creature of extreme envy. If you wish to be with another; I won't abide it. I will be the only one to have you in the most profane of ways." Loki's green eyes swarmed Clint again, lips slicing into a wet, forbidden grin. Clint chuckled and rolled his eyes again. How had he managed to want to get with such an absolute basket-case of a man, no God, was beyond him. Nothing he could do was normal. From middle of nowhere Iowa, to carnie, to SHIELD agent, to being seduced by the God of mischief in a billionaire's super-hero tower.

"Abide... you know we should probably watch the Big Lebowski at some point. And I don't know... You may just have to convince me on the exclusivity thing. What if there is some other good looking, crazy in bed, probably in the head as well, God who likes lime sherbet and 8 ball? Might just have to—" Clint's word died as his lips were claimed by an annoyed god. The shower still rained down on the both of them, but the water felt less hot than it did a few seconds ago.

"Is that a challenge Clint, to convince you?" Loki's eyes pierced him through like an arrow
through paper. Clint felt pinned against the wet tile even though no physical force held him there.

"It's an earnest request, Mr Profane." Clint almost cracked up, this ridiculous god was so full of himself, and he couldn't help but indulge it a bit. It was comforting in the oddest of ways, because he knew, deep down, Loki had dark corners of his mind that threatened to take control. He saw it that 'Doomsday night' when Loki made that magic tree, when Loki fled.

Clint wanted to see him lit and daring as the Fourth of July. But that didn't mean he was going to inflate his ego's to the size of Tony's.

"Be careful what you wish for, Clint." Clint loved the way Loki said his name, like it defined some emotion within Loki rather than just a syllable to say. Loki's eyes took on a dangerous zeal and while knowing it would be a while before Clint could do anything again, he used a bit of magic to stop the water in the pipes of the shower, and in the air. The water stream and droplets stopped in midair and Clint looked at it in wonder. Loki's magic never really ceased to surprise him, and sometimes even amazed him in its simplicity.

Loki gathered the warm liquid water in the air into his palms and charged it with magic. It glowed green, like a fiber optics toy.

"Ok, so Nat was really onto something with the name Glow Stick." Clint smirked as Loki took his water filled palms and pressed his hands into Clint's shoulders, massaging them. The glowing, possibly no longer water- now felt like oil, released all the tension, all the knots in his lats. Loki moved to his neck and the same wondrous, magic water began to relax his tired, overworked muscles.

"Would you like to see that glow as well? I have heard stranger requests." Loki and Clint shared a mutual laugh, Loki would laugh at his own joke. Clint really hoped he wouldn't make that glow. The massage felt so good that Clint closed his eyes as Loki's hands began to gather more green, glowing oil and travel down his obliques, a bit further down…and that's when Clint finally wised up to what Loki was really after.

And that'd he'd totally need a second shower.

"You insatiable dick! Do you have the libido of a sixteen-year old?! And here I was thinking you were capable of an innocent massage, hell innocent anything!" Loki's erection had pressed against his hipbone and Clint's muscles in his lower body felt like a jellyfish, well almost everything in his lower body. Loki answered him with a domineering kiss, all tongue, kneading lips, and deep moans, coming mostly from Clint.

"I think. Clint. If you truly desired something innocent, your cock wouldn't get hard as uru from someone like me." Loki, for effect grabbed Clint's rising dick with the glowing oil. Clint hated this God, absolutely hated. He wasn't about to get away with this crap again. Clint had seen enough porn, and had enough blow jobs performed on him to hopefully give one that wasn't completely terrible.

Clint grabbed Loki by the shoulders and flung him into the wall he had just been leaning against, the water started up again from Loki's surprise.

"And I think, if you really wanted someone who will just stroke your ego, you wouldn't act like a mess around me." Clint smirked, the water rushing over them. Loki made a move to say something, but nothing came out because that's when Clint went to his knees.
But that was all before the whole 'love is for children' bit. Nat filled him in that she said those words to him when he was 'imprisoned' on the helicarrier. When he pressed her about what really happened in Asgard she didn't say anything except giving him 'that Nat look' she only gave when she was taking some information to the grave.

So, of course he got nowhere with Nat. When the lightning bolt of an idea struck him to ask Rin, Nat just lazered him dead in the eyes and said 'No.' Mindreader.

Well, that and it wasn't like he was schooling his expression either.

Loki was the quintessential definition of 'hot and cold'. He couldn't tell if he really believed what he said or not, or if it mattered either way. He had just started to know the guy, since when did he start thinking about that four-letter word anyway? Wasn't he referring to Nat and Rin anyway? He couldn't believe that he saved Nat and Squirt because of his own schemes and games. Sure he schemed, but he genuinely seemed to like Nat, and no way did he not care about Rin.

But… how much did he really genuinely know what Loki wanted? Ugh, he had to stop thinking about him.

He eyed Sesshomaru who had been silent, and if his gaze could set the instrument cluster of the quinjet short circuit it would have.

He grabbed his phone and began to type into it…. 'How to give a better blow….' Clint stopped and erased that Google search before he completed it. For fucks sake, he was really not just about to type that. Was he?

He had to change the subject, like yesterday.

"You know. I gotta hand it to you Fancy Pants, you're a quick study. That take off wasn't half bad for a pilot with a little experience and you just learned from manuals. I gotta say, it's pretty much unheard of." Clint gave praise in field rarely, but he literally shook his head when the fur and armor wearing Demon Lord next to him switched the Main Power switch to 'on', the Engine Feed to 'NORM', then the Main Power switch to 'POWER'. Even switched the Master Light switch to 'on' and the Strobe Light to 'on' as well. All properly sequenced like he knew what he was doing, and did it like he had done it before.

Clint froze in the lung clenching hope that Fancy Pants really hadn't tried on the Quinjet before now.

Clint and Sesshomaru, together, pressed the Jet Starter and watched for the RMPs jack up to 20%, and clicked the ident to start the engines. They then idled the engines, and the VSTOL fired up nice and pretty. Clint checked the power management panel, and the remote control, and turned on the HUD. He checked the fuel, released the landing wheels and, while definitely a bit shaky, were on their way.

"…This Sesshomaru endeavors to understand your human technology." Sesshomaru stated neutrally, Clint would bet however the Demon Lord was pretty stoked about not crashing the Quinjet.

"Yeah, same here man, planes and SHIELD tech are one thing, kik or the latest crapsnap I still flounder at. I got Tony's Tivo down, gotta count for something. Though, my nieces and nephews probably know more than I do and they're just a little older than Rin." Clint rambled, thinking he
should really skype them soon.

Sesshomaru didn't respond and the jet fell into silence.

"So, what exactly are we questing for in the Bonneville Salt Flats, Don Quixote? I am gonna put in the coordinates with SHIELD for there, say we're investigating something, but after I am gonna have to tell Fury why we are using so much fuel to go there. I don't think he is going to accept 'treasure questing' as a real reason, and you were pretty vague last night." Clint smiled good naturedly, trying to get Fancy Pants to give him something.

He didn't like that he had to report into SHIELD knowing the spies within their ranks, but Nat said to keep his guard up and they had to pretend nothing was amiss. She also doubted they'd try anything on Fancy Pants considering how he very nearly blew his top earlier.

Clint then studied the Demon Lord. He couldn't pretend he could read Sesshomaru as well as Loki could, but he could sense something was up. He seemed in his head even more than usual.

"I seek a map to aid my scry, among other items. It is located in the salt lands you speak of. Once we arrive I shall find its exact location. I'll explain the rest when we arrive." Sesshomaru replied blandly, Clint had noticed he brought his swords with him, and that creepy flamethrower staff Jaken usually had. he brought his bow as well, just in case. Fancy Pants could attract as much trouble as Tony could.

Clint was not about to ask him about the swords because he was sure Fancy Pants would just go off into some nonsense about one of the swords solved a math problem, or made Rin's lunch.

"Yeeeeeah…I'm going to just tell Fury 'Soul Searching'. So, your plan, is to wander around the Salt Flats looking for a map? You know how big the flats are? I'm gonna have to call in some cars." Clint almost pushed the call button when Sesshomaru's eyes flashed in warning. It was the most emotion he had seen from the guy in the past few hours.

"I will not ride in your vehicles. You may follow me in one if you wish." Sesshomaru offered and Clint scoffed, a light bulb going off in his head.

"Yeah, that sounds boring, aren't quests about sticking together? You know what you would totally like Fancy Pants, are these." Clint brought up a photo of a Ducati 959 Panigale motorcycle on his phone and Clint nodded and smiled in a 'oh yeah' action.

Sesshomaru's eyes went wide and Clint swore he saw his ears move.

"Motorcycles, you ride them like bikes. You probably haven't seen too many around New York, but you'd totally like them, just like, I guess riding a horse or a—" Clint was cut off by Sesshomaru's quiet, intrigued voice.

"Dragon." Sesshomaru supplied, taking Clint's phone, turning it around. "I require a red one." Sesshomaru more demanded than requested and Clint laughed. He almost sounded like a kid picking out a toy in a store. Clint, however, thought it may be stretching their odd friendship by calling him out on that.

"Yeah ok, Khaleesi, let me call it in to Coulson, they'll have them prepped when we land in around three and a half hours. And here I thought you'd choose aqua or pink for your bike. Red, never would have guessed." Clint jabbed Sesshomaru and took back his phone, not liking how his talons could probably cut the screen in half.

"Red and White are the colors of my Lands. I am to adorn them to represent my station."
Sesshomaru slipped back into his uninterested tone, as if reciting some sort of well-rehearsed lesson. Clint sighed through his nose.

"Yeah, Thor let us in on that tidbit when Tony blew his stack the other day, remember?" Clint, a trained archer, saw little details and out of his peripheral vision. Sesshomaru checked their altitude, he spotted Demon Lord tense up. It was almost unnoticeable, but then Clint got it. Something happened between him and Tony.

"Ah...damnit, I should never take Nat up on any more bets. You think I would have won my lesson at pool. Tony pissed you off didn't he?" Clint cursed, running a hand over his face, thinking how his one hundred dollars could have been put to so many better uses that Nat buying more of that hair stuff she likes.

"...we had a miscommunication." Sesshomaru replied, sounding like the wind had been taken out of sails. Damn Tony, what'd you do now? "Where words clearly fail, might succeeds." Sesshomaru cracked his talons. Then it all clicked, the hole in the wall, the dent, Thor, Loki and Sesshomaru sparring with their real weapons. Man did Tony have like, zero self-preservation.

"Riiight, you know dictators here have said the same. You can't just go around attacking people because they piss you off, that's not how things work in this time, or probably in yours too." Clint winced, that had to have hurt. Though he figured would have heard if Tony got turned to green goo or something by now.

"Indeed." Sesshomaru managed, not elaborating further.

"Well, them's the brakes. But hey, on the bright side, you're about to listen to some epic music and go race Ducatis on the Salt Flats. Ultimate good time right here." Clint decided, that maybe Sesshomaru needed to mix it up. Clint put on the playlist he and Loki first sparred to, Skrillex was up first.

He changed it when he saw Sesshomaru visibly grimace.

"...why does he call this Sesshomaru, Sailor Moon? I have never disclosed an affinity for boats." Sesshomaru eventually asked. Clint suppressed a laugh, that was right he never was told who he referred to! Clint grabbed his phone and found a photo of the anime character.

"This is Sailor Moon, it's probably the long hair and you know your moon." Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed into slits and Clint pulled his phone away hastily.

"This Sesshomaru is no woman." Sesshomaru hissed. Clint sighed. He had just accused Tony of having no self-preservation, and he had gone and insulted Fancy Pants trapped in a flying metal box. It was tantamount to pissing off Bruce in the helicarrier.

"Don't take it personally. It's Tony; he thinks he's clever." Clint felt like he wasn't getting anywhere fast with Fancy Pants. He tried again to change the subject.

"So, first day, why did you think I was Loki's lover?" Clint asked of course his mind bouncing back to Loki and that got the attention of the Demon Lord, his eyes studying his shoulder.

"I smelled his magic on you, an aged protection spell. A very intricate and difficult spell. Loki would only use it on someone he wanted to protect dearly." Sesshomaru explained, and that floored Clint. He had never remembered Loki placing such a spell on him, not even under the mind control of the scepter.

"He has since placed another on you." Sesshomaru added before Clint could say anything and Clint
"He thinks he is so damn sneaky. I am not some kid. I can take care of myself just fine," Clint sneered, but it lacked a lot of venom that he wanted it to have. Sesshomaru just tilted his head to the side, then nodded in understanding.

"It is Loki's nature. While he can be...temperamental in mood, is quite steadfast in his what and who he covets. When decided, little will stop him at protecting it." Sesshomaru offered, speaking more liberally now, Clint noted. Perhaps they should stay on the topic of Loki and off the topic of Tony.

"So basically you're saying Loki is protective, possessive, and moody. Noted, sounds like a good time." Clint was rewarded with something akin to a snort from the Demon Lord if he made sounds like that. Clint then had a wicked idea, he could easily get some dirt on Loki. No one, save maybe Thor, knew him better. Clint's face carved into one of supreme anticipation.

"Loki's outbursts have gotten him into his fair of predicaments. However, don't underestimate his power. His magic, though fickle due to his emotions, can be immense when provoked. You humans and the Distant Realm dwellers laud Storm God for his physical prowess but know not and respect even less Loki's own capabilities." Sesshomaru explained glancing to Clint with a hint of seriousness.

"Distant Realm, you mean Asgard right?" Clint asked and Sesshomaru nodded curtly.

"So, what was the most powerful thing you guys fought?" The question was off Clint's lips before he even realized it and Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed in thought.

"We have dissimilar advantages. His most powerful adversary may have been a certain Phoenix Demoness. Mine was a Dragon we encountered whilst questing for uru-stone." Clint's interest was definitely piqued and he motioned for more and he swore he saw Sesshomaru sigh.

"The Phoenix Demoness was quite powerful, she won their duel in the end by calling him Kiki and igniting him in her feather fire. Loki rather dislikes fire magic. They would encounter each other again." Sesshomaru glanced his direction, noting the amused reaction on Clint's face. Clint nearly busted a gut. Too. Good.

"Oh man. Kiki?! You're a saint Sesshomaru. You let him call you by your nickname, but you haven't breathed a word about Kiki. This is paydirt. What else?" Clint exclaimed, smirking, Sesshomaru's eyes widened slightly in recognition.

"Loki distrusts owls; he does not like their swiveling heads and the noises they make." Sesshomaru continued and Clint began to make some notes in his phone: purple stag story, Kiki, owl stuff. Oh Loki, or rather, Kiki was going to get it. Clint began to think of a plan, a really good plan, involving the gym. Then it hit Clint he had to call Nat once they were an hour out.

Had it already been an hour?

The conversation was quick, though Clint could tell the others were absolutely astonished that Fancy Pants was co-piloting the Quinjet. Clint could tell from the screen that Loki was making pancakes which was oddly domestic of him, he must have been up to something. Clint watched Tony, he looked probably the most shocked about the whole thing. Guess you can surprise a genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist.

"So, what do you think of this invasion? Think we stand a chance this go around?" Clint turned to
Sesshomaru, suddenly serious. Something about seeing Loki smiling, making pancakes of all things made him think of the future.

"This Sesshomaru does not fail. I will make their enemy commander kneel before me. They will not claim sovereign this realm." Sesshomaru's voice carried a solid, cold authoritative tone that Clint was not about to question. Clint checked their fuel gauge, knowing that they'd have to refuel when they arrived at the Salt Flats. Clint quickly called it into Coulson.

"At least our side isn't lacking in the arrogance department. You, Tony and Loki could put them out of business. You and him strategizing over the invasion yet?" Clint joked, sixty percent serious. Sesshomaru cut a glare over to Clint, but the glare held little heat.

"Loki and I intend to bait and entrap them. We shall be at locations they will target, or entice them to go to one of our choosing. Your military strongholds and your provinces' capitals are alluring targets for our enemy." Sesshomaru flipped up a toggle switch. Clint leaned back, assessing if he really agreed with Fancy Pants and Loki being used as bait. It was a question of trust; he didn't think Loki would get himself killed.

"Oh, just using yourself as bait again I see. Are you sure fishing is Rin's favorite pastime and not yours?" The question got a quirk of an eyebrow out of the Demon Lord. Win. "SHIELD is working with NATO, the UN and the EU. So far they don't seem too convinced, but only Russia is outright opposed to the idea. They'll come around in time." Clint added, remembering yesterday was one long frustrating teleconference from hell. He did recall one great bit when Xi Jinping of China and Shinzo Abe of Japan started screaming to each other about islands and Justin Trudeau of Canada just took a drink of something that was so not 'iced tea' in response.

"Once I can properly scry, it will be far simpler to monitor enemy positions." Ah, so Fancy Pants didn't up and decide to go to the middle of Utah just because he assaulted Tony. He actually intended on doing this for tactical reasons as well. Well, more power to him, as long as he didn't turn into a screaming green tornado again.

"Still gotta scry me some lotto numbers, Miss Cleo." Clint grinned and this time he definitely saw Sesshomaru's ears go up.

The rest of the flight went by in comfortable conversations about music, strategy, and explaining to Fancy Pants how to ride a motorcycle.

A few hours later they landed, which while shaky and a bit rough, ended in success. Clint had to admit the flight was a lot less awkward than he thought it was going to be. He imagined Sesshomaru would be icy, perhaps bored that he had to drag him along.

Wait.

"So Fancy Pants, why did you bring me along? I mean we know you can cover some mad ground on your own." Clint asked, putting on sunglasses, noting Sesshomaru had his on now as well.

"Three reasons." Sesshomaru offered. Clint just leaned back expectantly, dangling the motorcycle keys just handed to him by an agent.

"I agreed to take an Avenger with me whenever I left New York. I decided on you, for you are far more tolerable company than the Storm God, and Bakusaiga has warmed to you. Also, I wished to test my skills of your Quinjet, and being that this Sesshomaru is no thief, left you or Romanoff to accompany me. Romanoff agreed to instruct Rin in weapons, so you remained." Clint felt mildly flattered, but scoffed at the sword reference. How can a sword warm to anyone?!
'Then again, When SHIELD went full tactical hit squad on Sesshomaru, Loki, and Bruce, Sesshomaru's magic sword, Tenseiga, looked like it obeyed Fancy Pants and flew across the room, I mean, the swords are definitely magic.' Clint reached back in the Jet for his bow, and showed his credentials to the agent, scanning them. He eyed him warily.

He didn't know if he could trust his own side or not before a goddamn invasion.

'Nat and Tony better figure out just who in SHIELD managed to hack Jarvis, while we're gone. I bet these Ducatis that the council above Fury would like nothing more to see Bruce, Fancy Pants and Loki under a knife, wondering what makes them tick.' Clint looked across the horizon of white, flat, steaming salt and brilliant blue sky. It was a nice day to let loose.

He looked and sure enough, Coulson had made sure that there were two 959 Panigale motorcycles, one flat black, the other crimson. Clint tossed the key to Sesshomaru, who caught it of course.

"I suppose if I say that your swords are just swords it won't matter to you would it? Plus that was really only two reasons." Clint strapped on his bow, ready for whatever 'treasure questing' actually brought him.

"The third I will address with you in time." Well, there he was being cryptic again.

"Well, let's go get your crystal ball working Fancy Pants. What exactly are we looking for?" Clint asked as they made their way to the motorcycles, helmets ready.

Though he doubted Fancy Pants would put a helmet on, god forbid he get helmet hair. Though Demon Lords probably had different crash test safety concerns than humans. He would obviously wear his, he had already changed into his riding gear in the plane and was not surprised when Sesshomaru managed to maintain proper position and altitude by himself while he was changing.

"We seek my mother's tomb, my mother and I much to discuss. The staff will alert me when we are close." Clint's eyes bulged out of his head as he clipped on his helmet. Did he hear him right? Mother's tomb? Man, should he had brought flowers or something? Clint didn't say anything, he really didn't think he would be like, exhuming a body or something. Did this make him a grave robber?

"So, we are going to talk to your mom's…spirit? You know, when you said treasure quest, I expected more like, buried treasure, and a lot less…family reunion. Let's just go." Clint relented, nothing was ever simple. He started the motorcycle, it vibrated, roared and gutturally growled. Now this was more like it. Clint felt the adrenaline crash through his bloodstream already, and he just started the Ducati. He was about to race a Demon Lord across the Salt Flats to find his mother's tomb so they could talk to her spirit.

Maybe he should have really taken a good crack at those 'where do I see myself in three years questions.'

He turned to Fancy Pants, who had managed to start his motorcycle, and tinker with the controls. He gave Fancy Pants a thumbs-up and the instant he locked eyes with the Demon Lord he flipped down his visor and took off at a blistering pace.

"Try and keep up!" Clint challenged with a sly smirk. The Demon Lord would just have to catch up, and unsurprisingly, quickly he did. Clint didn't know how he could ride the motorcycle with his huge pants, fur boa, but he managed to pull it off, his swords also glowed and then Clint stole a quick look at the Sesshomaru's face. He looked positively animated.
Well, as animated as he had ever seen him.

Clint rolled his eyes when Sesshomaru's blue youki spiked. Clint in return popped a wheelie to show off and ratcheted up the bike to race mode. Enjoying the torque, he throttled harder. He laughed as he saw in his side view mirror the Demon Lord go full tilt teenager over the bike. He definitely was a quick study.

Didn't seem like Fancy Pants did 'fun' too much.

Blood rushed through his veins and his pulse jacked up. He hadn't gone on a ride in far too long. He liked motorcycles as much as Steve and Nat, he just didn't always have the chance to go all out with them like they did. Steve was definitely more of an all-American highway cruiser motorcyclist though.

Clint pulled up alongside Sesshomaru and his face whipped over to him, his long silver hair would probably be a tangled mess. Sesshomaru motioned to right with his head and he leaned dangerously into the turn. Clint matched him, mirroring each other perfectly. They both grazed their knees into the turn for balance. A crazy thought popped into his head.

'Loki professional pool shark, Fancy Pants professional motorcycle racer. Maybe after the invasion stuff goes down, Steve, Nat, Fancy Pants and I could go on a ride or something. I know I can probably convince Loki to join. Maybe win some bet or something. Tony and Bruce can follow behind in Tony's Audi R8 and talk about electrons or whatever.' Clint couldn't help but think about how things could be after they shove their boots down Thanos' throat.

Eventually Sesshomaru decelerated and they reached a part of the blazing Salt Flat that looked about the same as any other.

So...this was it? Clint swung his leg over his Ducati after he turned the beast off. He took off his helmet and checked his quiver to account for all his arrows. He didn't know exactly why he brought them, but he was always prepared.

The staff's severed head was cackling. Holy fuck.

"That's definitely not going to give me nightmares." Clint sarcastically pointed at the staff of two heads and Sesshomaru raised an eyebrow.

The staff then shot water from the woman's mouth onto the sand which was displaced and absorbed quickly.

"Ok, so what now? Don't tell me we gotta dig." Clint kicked at the packed salt and he watched the Demon Lord run his claws through his long hair, no doubt trying to untangle some of it. Good luck with that Fancy Pants.

"I shall dig." Sesshomaru took off his sunglasses. His golden slit eyes glinted especially bright yellow in the refracted light and Clint snorted. Of course. Dig. How?

"Let me guess, one of your swords transforms into a bulldozer, the other a back hoe." Clint challenged, about to go to fish his phone out of his pocket to radio in for some shovels or god knows what.

"It will not be they who transform. It is best you get upwind." Sesshomaru's voice took on a ragged edge and Clint looked up to see his blue youki begin to swirl and his eyes bleed red. Clint reflexively itched for his bow as his markings widened and turned jagged.
"You gonna pass gas or something?!" Clint took a few more steps back, but Sesshomaru just answered with a sharp fanged smile from a mouth that began to split open. His eyes bled fully red, pupils turning an eerie shade of teal and his claws lengthened.

'Oh shit. This can't be good. He just smiled! God I hope he never does that again. What exactly has he been hiding?!!' Clint watched, awestruck and scrambled to get upwind as he figured out just why Sesshomaru was a Dog Demon. He gazed up as a massive, cream colored, furious looking dog grew in size and in horror. The fur rippled out like it had a life of its own and his paws had claws almost as long as Clint was tall.

'Ok, just when I thought I'd seen it all...nope, definitely not!' Clint's mind blanked recalled Sesshomaru helping Bruce as Sesshomaru grew into an enormous, incredibly furry, incredibly terrifying Dog with red eyes, blue moon and purple stripes flanking his jaw.

"Damn you're big Fancy Paws." He had to be over 350 feet tall and from his mouth steamed a noxious green gas. Ha, pass gas.

"I really should just keep my mouth shut." Clint finally closed his mouth, the fur boa made so much more sense. Clint covered his eyes and tamed every flight instinct in him not to bolt as the red eyes rolled over to him with interest.

Clint covered his ears as Sesshomaru let out a sharp bark and true to his nature, began to dig through the salt. Clint shrugged, whatever got the job done. He did feel a wave of awkwardness wash over him, however. Was he supposed to tell anyone about this? Clint figured Loki may know about Sesshomaru's dog form, but no one else, save Thor would. And Thor and Loki haven't brought it up.

Clint figured whatever he saw here he would run by Loki first. Only fair. Maybe Nat if she asked nice.

Sesshomaru was flinging salt everywhere and he had to hand it to Fancy Pants for telling him to get upwind. The guy could be pretty smart.

"Should have told Coulson I was taking my dog for a walk. Oh, what are you doing today Clint? Nothing, the usual, taking the dog for a walk...yeah you should see the size of plastic bag I have to carry. He puts Clifford to shame." Clint muttered as Sesshomaru began to slow in his progress and he heard a low growl and woof.

In a ball of light, the massive dog transformed back into the silver haired priss he knew. He and the Hulk had a lot in common, but at least Fancy Pants kept his clothes.

"So that's your 'other guy'?" Clint had to ask, if this is what Demons usually looked like he was instantly glad to be in this century.

"It is my true form. Many Demons have a humanoid form." Sesshomaru explained as the last of the red cleared from his calm eyes.

"Even Jaken?" Clint had to ask.

"Yes, Jaken has a true form." Sesshomaru began to descend into the hole he dug and Clint rushed up to follow. His mind spun with Jaken transforming into a giant toad.

"You may remain here if you wish." Sesshomaru looked up at Clint with an unreadable expression and Clint flashed a wild grin. Like hell he wasn't going to see what comes next. Also, Clint got the feeling Sesshomaru didn't particularly enjoy visiting his mother, or her tomb... grave thing.
"I did not sign up to do equivalent of 'wait by the car'. Let's go Fancy Pants." Clint began to more slide than walk down the huge hole. At the bottom he could see a blue glow. Clint slipped and fell more times than he'd like to admit.

"My mother…she dislikes humans. It is wise to keep that in mind when in her presence." Clint coughed. What? Maybe it was a good thing he brought his bow.

"I'll do my best to be as inhuman as possible then. Have any spare face paint?" Clint cursed as he slipped again, Fancy Pants was making it look easy. They finally did reach a rippling, blue forcefield and Clint stood behind Sesshomaru as he walked through it as if it was no big deal.

"Again, obituary will read: master Archer, motorcycle aficionado, uncle of two, complete moron who followed a Demon Lord into an unknown Demon tomb." Clint found himself holding his breath as he stepped through the barrier and other than a slight tingle, nothing happened. He let loose the breath he held with an audible whoosh.

Sesshomaru knelt motionless on the salted earth, hands brushing away salt from an area and Clint automatically saw bones. Damn. While Clint would rather be half dozen other places than looking at the remains of his friend's mother, he was glad he came. Fancy Pants was obviously off kilter, his hands were shaking ever so slightly.

Clint didn't dare say anything, nor barely breathe and Sesshomaru picked up his mother's skull, which still had flawless silver hair cascading down from it. Clint watched Sesshomaru, his expression remained stoic as usual, if not a little pensive. He put the skull down and searched more of the area, obviously looking for something, probably the map.

"It's not here. Just as I thought." Sesshomaru finally stated, eyes hard.

"The map?" Clint asked, looking around, he didn't see anything either. It was just a small alcove of salt and blue from the barrier.

"No, the Meido Stone. It is a powerful relic that opens portals to the Demon underworld and summons Demonic spirits from them." Sesshomaru picked up the skull and stuck his fingers deep in the right eye socket.

"I'm so glad I wasn't born in whatever century where I had to worry about giant dogs and portals to the underworld." Clint just swallowed, just what did he get himself into?!

"Mother used it sparingly. Whoever in our enemy's ranks who has it now, certainly does not." Sesshomaru tweezed out from the skull a pearl the size of a maraschino cherry. Clint's stomach mixed a bit, he was just taking things from his mother's skull?

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait. The Demon Demon spirit, the thing that only you and Tony can see, came from the stone? So our enemy has this stone can make more of these things?" Clint rocked back on his heels and his mouth dried out a bit.

"Summon, not create." Sesshomaru sharpened his gaze almost critically and stepped closet to Clint. "Stay alert Barton, you in due time may prove yourself critically useful in the upcoming battle." Clint opened his mouth to protest that while he didn't have magic or claws or a big metal suit he could certainly hold his own.

But then the death ray sword crackled with green lightning, the blue one glowed, and the staff cackled he lost his train of thought.

"Where are w—" The words died on Clint's lips as the pearl glowed blue and expanded around
them and in a flash they were transported to a grand castle front steps high in the clouds. Clint's jaw dropped, seated in front of him, in elegant splendor was clearly the female version of Fancy Pants.

They couldn't look more alike if you cloned them.

She had the moon, and a small squiggle of magenta on her cheeks. Her hair was up, lips painted, fur draped across both her shoulders. She even had the same bored expression on her beautiful face.

"I see you brought me dinner, how thoughtful of you." Sesshomaru's mother's lips curled up and her sharp gaze landed on Clint. This was a tomb?!

'Is she referring to me? Do Demons really eat humans?!' Clint tensed, wanting to reach for his bow, but if she was a spirit could he even hit her? Clint looked to Sesshomaru who simply exhaled.

"This human is not for your consumption. He is this Sesshomaru's escort." Sesshomaru stated without missing a beat, Clint relaxed. Ok, so at least he wasn't going to get eaten.

Clint was about to introduce himself when the swords on Sesshomaru's sash began to glow, one blue, one green, and in two glowing arcs they jumped and morphed out in front of them.

The glow faded and revealed a man about his height, and a girl about Rin's age.

"Grandmother!" Clint's disbelief was palpable as the little, silver-haired girl. She had to be no older than Rin and the spitting image of Sesshomaru run up and hug the older, possibly sadistic human eating Demon woman. No. way.

"What… am I on drugs?" Clint murmured to himself. He was trained by SHIELD to know when drugs were in his system so he sort of doubted it.

"I have not drugged you, Barton." Sesshomaru, oh of course he heard that.

"I can't believe they're people. Your swords are actually people." Clint murmured again to himself and he swore he heard Sesshomaru sigh through his nose.

"Hello my dear Bakusaiga. Your father should have really brought you to me before I was slain so brutally! What did I do to deserve such a selfish and callous son?!” Sesshomaru's mother wailed and Clint could pick up the guilt trip like a backpack it was so heavy. Sesshomaru just narrowed his eyes.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Clint. I am Tenseiga." Clint literally jumped. He had been focused so much on the little girl, Bakusaiga, he didn't hear the other one stand next to him.

He may have made an ass of himself and gasped audibly. Standing in front of him was the perfect blend of Loki and Sesshomaru. His eyes danced with fire like Loki's, but were slit and gold like Sesshomaru's. His grin and nose were all Loki, while his build was certainly more bulky and less lithe. Though his hair was silver like Sesshomaru's it was slicked back and flipped out too the way Loki styled his. His clothes were even a perfect blend of Loki and Sesshomaru. He wore a similar get-up of Loki's armor, but in a dark blue, but Sesshomaru's parachute pants, also in blue.

The only things that didn't match were the big triangle dog ears, a lack of face paint, and his deep tan. Neither Loki nor Sesshomaru were this built or tan. Then Clint remembered what Loki said about the sword, maybe a blend of Loki and Sesshomaru's dad instead of Sesshomaru.

Clint then realized he hasn't said anything yet.
"Um, hey. Ok…I take back all that I said about you two being just swords. Maybe I should have just stayed by the bikes…." Clint found his voice and Tenseiga laughed. His laugh sounded like Loki, and his stomach hitched a bit awkwardly.

"Barton!" Bakusaiga, flung herself off Sesshomaru's mother and skidded to a halt in front of Clint. Her large, purple-lidded gold eyes shown hard, yet excited. She had the same markings as Fancy Pants only all of hers were purple and she only had one stripe. She was a cute kid, spitting image of her… Wait father?!

"I am the resplendent Bakusaiga, the grandest weapon in existence! Together with my father and that stick-in-the-mud Tenseiga, we seek greatness and power unparalleled!" Barton stifled a laugh, like father like daughter in terms of confidence levels. So, Thor was right, Sesshomaru literally made a sword-daughter. And while a lot more expressive than her father, her arrogance was right on target.

"Hey there, nice to uh, meet you. I gotta feeling if you keep up with your death ray stuff you'll be unbeatable." Barton offered, a bit awkward, Bakusaiga acted almost like an adult.

"You may witness my glory first hand! I intend to maim the shiny metal Stark. He interrupted my very first scry and he dishonored my father by rutting with another human! You enjoyed my performance against the enemy vessel correct? Convince my father to wield me against him!" Clint stared wide eyed at the girl-sword in front of him.

Oh man if she and Nat ever met….

Clint then realized what Sesshomaru meant by 'miscommunication'. Clint sighed, he really did lose that $100. He was so sure Steve and he were right, that Tony really had it for Fancy Pants bad. Guess not. No wonder Fancy Pants was in such a funk, he thought they were something that obviously Tony didn't think they were. Clint couldn't help but feel bad for the guy, even if he may have physically let Tony have it.

Clint looked down at the upset little girl in front of him and leaned down. She was looking after her dad alright. It was something he could relate to wholeheartedly.

"We'll figure something out, alright short stuff?" Clint put out his hand in a high five and she slapped it. She clenched her fists and gave a wide, fanged smile in victory

"Father, your former intended doesn't stand a chance!" Bakusaiga fist pumped and her eyes flashed like a predator about to strike. Clint chuckled a little as he saw Sesshomaru's eyebrows lift as if humoring her.

Former intended? What in the hell did that even mean? Oh god, what did I just agree to?" Clint straightened, looking at the group around him. What sort of family reunion did he actually crash? he bounced up and down like a little kid in front of her father. While Fancy Pants didn't strike him as very fatherly, his mouth definitely crooked up the slightest bit at her antics.

"And Barton, just maybe if you learn to use your purification magic you can just turn him to ash!" Bakusaiga jumped and danced, her lips curled up vibrantly and Clint couldn't help but think that it was exactly how Fancy Pants looked when he laughed in the training room. He then paused.

"Purification magic?" Clint parroted and was ignored by everyone. Ok, no, this was not the time for everyone to ignore him, or look at him like was the moron.

"You brought a Priest to my tomb, Sesshomaru? Have you any decorum? I won't tolerate this." The
hair pricked up on the back of Clint's neck as the red-eyed Demoness lunged. This was not the attention he wanted. His instincts kicked in and in record time he knocked back a standard arrow and let-er fly.

Only his jaw dropped when the arrow streamed with a muted, purple glow. So, he hadn't made up doing that to Coulson. Right?

His mother dodged the arrow effortlessly and her claws glinted green as she swiped out towards him. Ok, fuck manners, he wasn't going to let ghost mom just get away with attacking him.

And he definitely didn't need to be rescued, he could handle her himself.

He brought plucked another arrow but didn't have time to fire it before she closed the distance. Instead he moved to block her with his bow.

'If her toxin is anything like Fancy Pant's my bow is gonna get trashed!' Clint braced himself and to his astonishment the bow glowed a faint, muted purple again and repelled her claws back like a small shock.

Sesshomaru's mother stepped back, cradling her right hand.

"If I had even half the strength I used to possess, you uncultured peasant, I would fillet you and serve you to the birds of paradise!" She seethed, her pretty features contorting from her lengthened fangs.

Sesshomaru took a step forward.

"Mother enough. He has just recently tapped into his powers, no doubt a side effect of Loki's tampering magic." Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes accusingly at Tenseiga.

"My forger can hardly to blame for inadvertently awakening a dormant power within a human. Magic can have many unintended outcomes." Tenseiga replied, a smile playing on his cheeks.

"An untrained priest is a deadly one Sesshomaru. Surely you don't expect your volatile friend, the now deposed Prince Loki, to train him? If he couldn't remove a simple enchanted arrow from that Hanyou's shoulder, if he can't even control his own magic on a good day, how do expect for him to properly train a priest?" Sesshomaru's mother's voice took on a condescending tone that really started to grate on him.

"Can everyone stop talking about me like I'm not in the tomb?!" Clint had finally had enough. "What's going on with me?" He had never been much of a religious guy so he doubted they were talking about him entering seminary school.

"My third reason for bringing you here, Barton. Loki's protection spell has awoken your ancestors' purification magic within you. I intended to see how much potential you have. If you have the capability of seeing my mother's spirit and repelling her, you can do the same to spirits we may later encounter." Sesshomaru imputed. Ok, so what he was magic now? Was this some sort of test? Did he really just bring him here to see if his mother would kill him or not?!

"My Lord, Clint is quite old to start his magic training, and his magical bloodline is quite diluted. I don't expect him to succeed in becoming powerful like the priestesses of our time." Tenseiga warned, again they were talking like he wasn't even there.

"You're such an old man worry wart Tenseiga! Who cares if Barton can't be the most powerful
Priest? All he needs to do is help you get those dumb Demonic Spirits under control since I can't hit 'em. We three together are the most powerful beings in existence and that's all that matters!" Bakusaiga put her hands on her hips and everything clicked into place.

The dragon spirit Sesshomaru and Tony were talking about, they thought he could shoot them? He couldn't even see it the last time!

"So… that's what this is about. You really want me to be a ghostbuster?" Clint leaned back, studying Sesshomaru as his cold eyes gave him the up and down. If he didn't know better, which he did, he would have thought he was checking him out.

"You may suffice. It is indeed a burden placed upon you from the negligence of my mother."

Sesshomaru cut the tense air with his sharp words and his mother barked in laughter.

"Oh, I just love your visits Sesshomaru. They're positively amusing." Sesshomaru's mother crossed the distance between them, burned hand forgotten. "Me? Negligent? If I died in this branch of time, what do you think happened to you? There are no Demons here, correct? And that includes you, does it not?" Sesshomaru's mother bit out. Clint held his breath unintentionally as Sesshomaru's eyes widened in realization.

"Oh yes my son. You were slain in this branch of time as well, and long before I fell. You, Bakusaiga, and Tenseiga were all massacred." Sesshomaru's mother's ruby painted lips split into a sad smile.

"When your clueless sorcerer friend took you with Asgard's magic gate, it created two realities, two branches of time. One branch is the time you are in now, in which you were not spirited away by the magic gate. The second branch, the one in which you were spirited away, is the one you currently left behind."

"You call me negligent? Foolhardy. You abandoned one branch of time, and based on your folly and your lackluster training with Tenseiga and Bakusaiga, will die twice in this one." Sesshomaru's mother continued and her tone was really beginning to grind Clint's gears. Bakusaiga gritted her little fangs and reflexively grabbed Clint's shirt. Tenseiga's jaw dropped and took a closer stance next to Fancy Pants.

"Grandmother, father and I have worked hard. So has Tenseiga!" The little demon girl beside him growled. Clint found himself feeling oddly protective, seeing Bakusaiga's little frame tremble in anger. Grandmas were supposed to be baking cookies or at the very least not talking about them dying.

Also, Loki did the only thing he could! Loki was a lot of things, but clueless wasn't one.

He still had the arrow in his hand and with a quick movement he strung it and snapped it back. The purple glow around the arrow was brighter this time as it sang through the air before being struck from the air by a green whip.

Sesshomaru's green whip.

"Do not fall for my mother's word traps so easily Barton. You have made your point."

Sesshomaru murmured impassively and turned to his mother. "Whatever befell this other Sesshomaru here in this time is none of my concern." Clint had to hand it to Sesshomaru, he could really keep his cool.

His mother just chuckled at him primly. If Clint didn't know better, but he did, he would say she looked sad.
"I refuse believe my Lord, Bakusaiga, and I will fail here, and I dislike you speaking ill of my forger." Tenseiga next to him hissed and it was then Clint realized that his nose scrunched up the same way Loki’s did when he was pissed.

"Have whichever dreams and see whatever delusions you wish, I know precisely what I’m speaking about Tenseiga…don’t I, son? Haven’t you also seen yourself fall, not to Thanos or his minions, but to the God of Thunder and his magic using brother, Loki? Yes I speak of your forger, Tenseiga. Nothing but misfortune and tragedy awaits you three if you align with the Aesir to destroy Thanos. Bakusaiga will break, Tenseiga captured, and you will fall by the God of Thunder's hammer." Her voice took on a serious, pointed note and Clint hopped back ungracefully as Sesshomaru rushed forward unexpectedly and peered down his nose at his mother.

"Mother, what I scryed was a vision you gave me?" Sesshomaru placidly accused, but even Clint could feel his spine tingle from his simmering anger.

"Yes, and I do believe it is time that Tenseiga, Bakusaiga, and I guess I suppose even this Priest know exactly what will happen when you try to save something Thanos wants so much to destroy." Sesshomaru's mother frowned slightly as she reached up with one elegantly clawed finger and tapped the moon on Sesshomaru's forehead. Clint licked his lips as all his markings turned black and in front of him, like some magic projector, an image began to form.

His stomach churned with acid and dread, he had a bad feeling about this. Maybe he should have just waited out by the bikes.

Chapter End Notes

A short Clint chapter to link up the back story and the action to come! Sorry again about the delay, thank you to all my wonderful readers!!! You continue to inspire me :) let me know what you think!!!

-TL
Sesshomaru and the Leyline

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sesshomaru and the Leyline.

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Sesshomaru's lungs clenched together, both grinding and cramping. She crossed a line by interfering directly with his mind, showing him images she herself scryed.

Or simply fabricated.

Now she planned on showing others what she burdened him with. What right did she have? What madness had afflicted her since he last saw her? He should have known coming to see his mother would result in nothing but time wasted and more difficulties. His new scrying gift perhaps wasn't worth this exhaustive effort.

She had no right to reveal his thoughts to anyone, especially to Bakusaiga, who in these ludicrous visions had been killed. It wasn't a foreign phenomenon for his mother to show himself such brutal scenes, quite another to show such a young pup them, especially her own kin.

Especially a pup whom she'd never met, and his very own progeny.

He'd also rather Barton, who had been slain by his intended's brother, not witness such barbarity. He had so far had a rather comfortable arrangement with the human, and was content with his company. He shouldn't have to be at the spear's tip of his mother's meddlings.

Even Tenseiga, whom was no maiden to war and violence, didn't deserve to witness such fictions. He knew that Tenseiga would take his abduction by Loki, and inability to protect him, quite poorly.

Sesshomaru sighed through his nose. They'd surely take them the wrong way. How tiring.

"This quest of greatness, this empty-headed desire to defend this realm by cooperating with the humans and those two Gods, is false and ultimately futile. Perhaps, it's something that our dear late Inu no Taisho wanted for him when he grew a heart for that Izayoi. But, it was never, and has never been his true destiny." Inukimi's words iced over the room and pointed to the moon on Sesshomaru's head, it turned black. Behind them, projected the beginnings of the scry that he saw from his failed scry attempt.

"In every outcome of this invasion, in every future I have seen, you die Sesshomaru. In different ways, by different allies, different foes. Most of your companions die, some live. In scant few scrys is the invasion is thwarted, mostly by Odin's hand; in most scrys it is not. This version is the one that came to me most frequently." Inukimi turned to face the vision, as did everyone else who did not immediately face it. Sesshomaru growled, unable to suppress it, how dare his mother pass off her own mind fictions as predetermined facts?

"Barton, you may not want to watch." Sesshomaru cautioned uncharacteristically. Barton turned back to him, face scrunched in annoyance.

"So now you are treating me like a kid, trust me I'm a SHIELD agent, I have probably seen much
worse." Barton turned back to see the first death, the evisceration of their leader, Rogers from behind by Loki and the color drained from his face.

He hadn't expected Barton to entertain Bakusaiga nor accept her, nor Tenseiga's humanoid form readily. Barton had initially been one of the ones who insisted they were mere swords. This unexpected outcome pleased Sesshomaru. It would be good for Bakusaiga and Tenseiga to become more acquainted with others besides himself.

Maybe they would cease prattling on and on to him, and instead chatter to Barton.

He also hadn't expected Barton to accompany him this far. Sesshomaru was certain that when he transformed that Barton would attempt to shoot him with arrows, like most humans did aside from Rin and Kohaku.

But he didn't. He didn't even scream or make a scene; he was certain he even heard him joke about it. Sesshomaru respected Barton for that. He also respected him for not showing fear in front of his mother. Sesshomaru much disliked visiting his mother, but it had to be done. Perhaps he should have given the Archer more credit, he had introduced him to that red metal dragon.

"Fa-Father, how could I have been shattered? What devilry is this?! This cannot be true; I cannot be killed! I'm stronger than any weapon…the best…." Bakusaiga ran to Sesshomaru and clung to his leg, looking up to him with fear clear in her eyes.

He gazed down at her placidly, his breath paused. She reminded him of Rin in that small instant. He reached down to pat her on the head like he would to Rin, but caught himself in the movement. Bakusaiga wasn't a human, she was a Demon and seasoned warrior, he couldn't afford to be soft with her before the coming armada. He had to be firm with her, yet he couldn't allow doubt to creep into her head that she was anything less than worthy.

"What do you believe, Bakusaiga?" He questioned and her gold eyes hardened. It was almost staring at himself. A vaguely eerie feeling blanketed him.

"Grandmother's scrys are quite accurate, she wouldn't lead us astray…would she?" Bakusaiga murmured. Her voice sounded thin, and as immature sounding as, strangely enough, Inuyasha when he spoke of their father whom he never truly met.

"No, Nat!" Barton called out as he saw Romanoff get struck by Thor's thunderbolt, not to move. Superb, he had forgotten about Romanoff's demise.

"My Lord, I cannot fathom my forger would betray you like this! He helped forge me to guide and protect you. He wouldn't forsake that!" Tenseiga's ears, which reminded him so of Inuyasha, flattened onto his head in horror. He stepping back subconsciously to stand beside Sesshomaru and his posture reminded him of his father.

Barton gasped when he saw Banner get shot by the golden rod, not to move. This was why he didn't allow anyone into his thoughts. Now they were all getting emotional over nothing. He wouldn't allow this future to happen.

"Loki….Oh I'm going to be sick." Barton put a hand to his mouth, face pale as he witnessed his own demise, Mjolnir pulverizing his body, it slapping the pavement. Sesshomaru remained silent; there was nothing to say. Yet more evidence that he failed his first scry to find the Other. Embarrassment clearly followed him like a shadow recently.

He should have known his mother would find and exacerbate any weakness, any failure of his he
could make and bring it to light.

Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles when Loki cleaved Stark in two, and Barton dry heaved once when Thor pulped Loki's head off his shoulders. Bakusaiga let out a sharp cry.

"Ok, I can see why you may not have wanted to eat venison after seeing that." Barton bit his lip and Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow.

"Teennnsaaaaaaa! This is your fault. I told you. I told you! These Gods, these humans will only bring harm to my Father! They are false creatures. You saw what that Storm God did to his own brother and the hilarious Barton! You saw what the Magic User did to our father's former intended and the leader of their clan! You are wrong; grandmother is right! I will not let you lead us down this path!" Bakusaiga ratcheted up her youki, fangs lengthened, claws extended. She lunged at Tenseiga who retreated to the side, face flushed. Barton backed up, clearly trying to avoid the fight.

"Bakusaiga." Sesshomaru warned. "Tenseiga does not control my actions, nor does mother see ones I have yet to take. I will not allow this vision to come to pass." Sesshomaru glared at his mother who simply sat there with a satisfied look on her face. Bakusaiga's trembling ceases and Barton coughed, clearly trying to gain back composure.

"Hmph. You deserved a worse death than that for allowing my precious Granddaughter to be slain as such. I gave you this vision to educate you Sesshomaru." Inukimi stated primly, which simply rankled Sesshomaru.

"Ok, I know you don't like humans but he should at least know all the facts before you go and manipulate him into doing what you want. That blue…err…woman, in the background in Shanghai? She has the mind control scepter. The same one Loki had during the first invasion; the same one that turned my twisted my loyalties and controlled me. Thor and Loki didn't betray anyone. Didn't you hear him yell 'no' when Thor was about to kill Fancy Pa—I mean Sesshomaru. Obviously, Loki was fighting the mind control. The enemy somehow got a hold of the scepter and turned Thor and Loki against us with it." Barton shouted sternly, voice strong as if to confront his mother. She cracked her knuckles and Tenseiga's ears pricked up, as did Sesshomaru's eyes widened and pupils constricted. His claws produced his signature toxin and he clenched his fists.

'So, Storm God and Loki didn't betray us. They were forced to kill the humans and myself. It is why Loki hesitated to attack Barton in the scry. It is why Loki didn't kill me himself.' Sesshomaru didn't let the relief show on his face, but his ears twitched, releasing the tension in his neck muscles.

"My forger, controlled by another?! By the enemy?" Tenseiga's aura pulsed, ears lowering, throat growling. Bakusaiga crossed her arms, not liking any of it.

"It matters not under what duress they cut you down my son, only that your death is unavoidable. Your father never quite understood that the destiny he had in mind for you was short-sighted and made you weak. Your destiny has always been ultimate conquest, to rule supreme. Since your creation, I remained confident you would ascend to rule and protect all the Demons. Not any and all lifeforms to wander into Western Lands and fall under your dominion and your responsibility. Your destiny no longer lies in the past, in the Western Lands." Sesshomaru stilled, upon hearing his mother make the same point again, ears flat against his head.

'Stay? Here? My Lands, Ah-Un, what of Inuyasha, my responsibilities? How can they both change what they want from me so easily? The reason for my creation was to conquer the Four Lands, now it is to find some worthless Demons and rule them? In what land? First father changing his
mind about protecting humans and Half-Demons, now mother and her hunts.' A dark pit of crushing weight began to pit deep in Sesshomaru's icy chest.

"Don't give me that look Sesshomaru. What a petulant, spoiled son I have. You were meant for far greater feats than owning a bit of land in Honshu." Inukimi giggled slightly and Sesshomaru suppressed a growl. How dare she mock him and falsely praise him so in the same breath?!

"I have had enough of your false flattery." Sesshomaru pulsed out his youki. "Tell this Sesshomaru of what you conspire." Sesshomaru's voice fell like a guillotine on his mother. Barton gave him a hidden thumbs-up and he had no idea why.

"Conspire is such a strong word. I prefer guide. I intend to guide you to even greater heights, to show you what your potential is. To show you that toppling that Titan is a waste of your time and efforts." Inukimi smirked, and Sesshomaru refrained from showing any reaction.

"Father, Tenseiga, and I have gotten much stronger on our own! I totally swatted one of their vessels from the sky no sweat! We are the strongest being, nothing can stop us!" Bakusaiga jumped and tugged on one of Tenseiga's fussy triangle ears.

Sesshomaru raised his ears at the antic and Barton's laughed at Tenseiga's dismay.

"Ever confident aren't we my precious one." Inukimi smiled warmly at the girl then turned back to Sesshomaru, gaze icy. "All so confident, yet oh so careless." Her voice dropped the temperature of the room.

"Is this really how you as a family interact? No wonder Fanc-Sesshomaru never bring the grandkid for family game night." Barton huffed, Sesshomaru noted his sarcasm, something he and Loki both had in common. Inukimi ignored Barton and instead approached himself.

"Sesshomaru. Show me your left arm now." Sesshomaru glared back suspiciously, his mother was up to something he knew it, but the gaze in her eyes seemed serious.

"For what purpose?" Sesshomaru bit out, was she trying to humiliate him? Inukimi approached him, though shorter than Sesshomaru, and feet and ankles dissipating into thin air, stood solid and demanding as ever.

"You were seen on the Astral Plane. It was the other reason I showed you that scry, to keep him from crawling into your mind. I need to see what he wrote. His signature." Inukimi demanded and Sesshomaru's eyebrows lifted slightly.

'So, she knows of that mark. I healed it long ago, how does she know of it now?' Barton and Bakusaiga, who now held onto his belt loop as if sheathed to it circled around. Tenseiga also looked to him.

Sesshomaru pulled back his yukata sleeve and to his well suppressed horror, the name 'the Other' was carved deep, as scrawling, hatched letters into his under arm. The blood began to drip, and coagulate.

"That's one ugly tattoo...but seriously, what the hell? Does Loki know about that?" Barton exclaimed and Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes at him. Of course he didn't know. He would never hear the end of Loki's overprotective nagging. He also thought it was taken care of.

"Father, the Other has seen you! This is most troublesome; he knows you can access the Astral Plane!" Bakusaiga's voice cracked and Inukimi placed her palm on the carved name and with a flash of white light, it disappeared. Her lips were tugged in a slight frown.
'This makes sense, if the Other saw me on the Astral Plane, that is how his minions found me in the Central Park so easily. I have allowed the enemy a critical advantage, I must rectify this.' Sesshomaru's expression darkened slightly.

"Oh Sesshomaru, you must enjoy having a death wish." Inukimi stated quite non-chalantly. "You have let him, him of all Sorcerers, find you on the Astral Plane. I can fade this mark, but heed my warning: if you are near a magic source of his, he can enter your mind with his own magic. He may even find your exact location. You won't be able to interfere with his magic until hone your gifts. He will have to be destroyed, or you will have to get much stronger to fully erase the signature. Neither of which I see you doing. Oh well." Inukimi flippanently smirked and Sesshomaru wanted to strike her.

"This quest of yours, this senseless defense of the human realm, you will surely fail it." Inukimi continued thinly, her voice light and airy as if she invited Sesshomaru over for tea. Sesshomaru suppressed another growl. He did not care what this sorcerer thought he saw; he did not care about his mother's predictions.

"I will not die. The Mad Titan will kneel in fealty before me, and I will cleave off his head." Sesshomaru pulled the sleeve of his yukata back down with a solid yank and Inukimi simply laughed.

"Yeah, we are the most majestic, powerful being in existence Grandmother! We will surely trample him!" Bakusaiga insisted once more, tossing her hair like he would. It was peculiar seeing someone look and act like him so. Tenseiga wore a wary expression, triangle ears low, he didn't appear to be liking what Inukimi had to say.

"Inukimi, what causes you to say such things? His destiny, entwined with those of the humans and the Gods, point to a victory. What do you know? There is something you aren't telling us, isn't there?" Tenseiga demanded, fists clenched. Inukimi swiveled her head over to Tenseiga and jutted her chin up haughtily.

"Your true destiny is to redeem your previous failure in this time! You were created to rule all the Demons with the power of the Astral Plane. You are tasked with finding our kind that were spirited away from our world by Odin. You also need to keep separate the two halves of the Soul Gems of the Greater Cosmos. The Meido stone and Sounga are not what they seem." Inukimi insisted, fangs bared in anger. Sesshomaru's eyebrows furrowed. What about Sounga? Hadn't she said something in reference to Sounga before? That he hadn't known what Sounga truly was?

What was Sounga truly? What was the Meido stone if not a mere portal?

Barton straightened.

"Odin? What does he have to do with any of this? Are you going to actually be straight with us? It seems like you got one hell of a narcissism complex and you're hell bent on this whole smoke and mirrors thing. Wake up Vanna White, you're not helping anyone by playing guess the puzzle! God, and I thought Loki was bad." Barton finally exploded, face flushed and the veins in his forearms bulging from gripping his bow. It even glowed a faint purple.

Sesshomaru was a little taken aback. He thought that restraint and discipline would be two things that Barton wouldn't require to hone his purification gifts being a soldier. Perhaps he was mistaken, this encounter had definitely riled him. Maybe it was a mistake to bring him after all.

"Grandmother, I want to know what's going on! What is Sounga?" Bakusaiga's voice got high, but spirited. He wasn't too sure if he wanted to see her in her humanoid form more or not. A small
kernel of himself welcomed the idea, but it would present its own problems.

He had to focus on training, her humanoid form would be a distraction from that.

"Sounga is a wicked thing, the Sword of Hell itself. A vile creation that has no place by my Lord's side nor tampered with in anyway. My Lord, I know of your previous zeal for Sounga, but you have Bakusaiga now. She is much more valuable than your father's cursed sword!" Tenseiga's seethed, blue aura bright. It lashed out unpredictably and while he knew his mother felt it, and it had to have burned her, she showed no sign of discomfort.

"What?! You want to replace me Father?! Who is this other Sword?! I will best him, then Mjolnir!" Bakusaiga's golden eyes ignited.

"Silence." Sesshomaru sliced his gaze over to all of them. Would he be the only one present to show any modicum of control? If they became so incensed over his mother's antics, would they be so apt to lose their cool once the enemy arrived. He hoped not.

"Allow me to begin from the beginning. Long ago, beings called the Celestials tampered with the bloodlines of Demons, along with supposedly other races. Why they did so, I know not, however it had resulted in two races of Demons, the Deviants and my superior line, the Eternals."
Sesshoumaru's eyes widened slightly as an image appeared of his mother's kingdom, only instead bereft and desolate of Demons, the paths were lined with groups of them, bustling markets, a full royal guard.

Then slowly, the crowds thinned out.

"The Eternals, while potent with ability, were weak in body. We were plagued with illness, disorders, and shortened lifespans. My parents, seeing our inevitable decline, had tried to strengthen me, but my body couldn't handle the strain of accessing more than a portion of the power of the Astral Plane. Eventually, they wished for me to mate into the Deviant race, to produce an heir to combine both races." Sesshoumaru's expression didn't change as it revealed his mother's parents: her father was golden haired and golden eyed with magenta markings, while her mother had the same color markings, and was silver haired and violet eyed. She much resembled Bakusaiga. He didn't know he subconsciously made the comparison until it happened.

"However, it had never been done before. The Deviant race wanted nothing to do with us. They wanted us to die out. Our power to reach the Astral Plane, though heavily guarded in secrecy, was rumored by the Deviants, and curiously enough, the Aesir, to be malevolent." An image of his mother, much younger, and his father as well, a bit older than himself he supposed but not by much, appeared. He thinned his lips.

"So, you're basically used to create someone to extend your race...that's some eugenics stuff right there." Barton imputed and Sesshomaru glared back icily.

"Your father, Inu no Taisho, stumbled upon a Gem of the Greater Cosmos. This one he discovered was the Soul Gem of the Greater Cosmos. It nearly consumed his soul. It was fortunate for my parents' plan really, because they were the only two who could save him, and seal the stone away into two halves." Inukimi explained, curling her fingers around her long, silver hair. Sesshomaru's eyes sharpened. The pieces fell into place.

"The Meido Stone, and Sounga. They are each one half of the Cosmic Gem." Sesshomaru, despite his mother's insistence, didn't need her to spell it out to him.

"Maybe you do catch onto somethings quickly. Yes. One half of the gem was sealed in the pommel
of Sounga, and the other half became the Meido stone. My parents saved your father's soul in exchange for you. And well, I must say, so far you have been far less than anticipated, and created more harm than good." Inukimi knit her mouth into a tight, unattractive bundle. It as if the words she said were acidic, or weren't ones she necessarily wanted to say.

Was she being purposely condescending to him? If so, for what purpose?

"Grandmother are you to say that you regret our existence? You just said we were destined for greatness!" Bakusaiga interjected, Sesshomaru allowed it. An out of place protectiveness caused his chest to rumble, hopefully unheard.

Tenseiga shot him a knowing, warm stare. Not unheard.

"Of course not my dear, What I meant was that by splitting the stone, it released energy, and thus and attracted some entities who endeavored to collect it. It took them a long time to find us, I tried to keep it hidden, I thought sealing it away would prevent them from finding us, but using the Meido Stone on Rin, hastened their location of the Soul Gem." Inukimi's voice softened unexpectedly.

"It was your decision." His ears lowered and his knuckles cracked. So. That was why she was so hesitant to use it to revive Rin long ago. She knew that it would be a beacon to find them.

"Yes, yes it was. And one I do not regret making." Inukimi supplied, almost warmly, and Sesshomaru believed her.

"So…if I'm catching everything correctly, the people who were after the gem, they came to earth to get it?" Sesshomaru almost forgot Barton stood beside him.

"Perhaps you humans have evolved some brains after all. The very Titan you want to defeat now, came here, to this very planet, five hundred years ago. He came, actually, not long after Loki summoned you here with the magic gate. He came to search for the gem, and he ended up starting a war. A war against the Demons, a war, Sesshomaru, you would lead and you would lose."

Inukimi's own moon turned black, and the images of Demon and Chitauri corpses. Crimson drenched fields, shredded flesh, splintered bone, and fire, so much fire.

Hovering in the smoking sky, two long cruisers loomed and a ringed battleship idled.

"The Mad Titan my forger spoke of has already been here once before, and my Lord, Bakusaiga, and I lost to him?" Tenseiga asked, transfixed by the image he had been shown. His triangle ears flicked nervously back and forth.

"No. Tenseiga, that wasn't us. Those guys were just posers, fakes." Bakusaiga's words rang strongly as she often tried to portray herself. As he, Sesshomaru supposed, he did when he was her age, but the tremble in her hands, showed her trepidation. A tell he also too had when he was young.

"This Sesshomaru has never led a war I did not win. This other Sessshomaru you speak of, was not me and was indeed weak." Sesshomaru's voice landed hard, much unlike Tenseiga's and Bakusaiga's and it almost sounded like it would convince his mother.

Inukimi's face paled to a color of bleached bone.

"It was every bit you. I gave birth to you and I know my son. I know you, whether you want to believe it not. You have a duty Sesshomaru, a duty to rectify your failure, not only to me, but to our people." Inukimi's voice leaked out like a stream of dark silk. She implied something there, something he was missing.
Five hundred years ago…right after Naraku.

Barton however didn't.

"Wait, wait, wait…are you saying he's to blame, even though you knew an attack was coming and didn't tell your own son? What about Loki and Thor? Didn't they help him?" Barton asked, voice trailing. Loki. Storm God. He would have insisted for them not to help, but if Loki Storm God together willed to defend a domain that their father claimed to be a protectorate of he could not have stopped them from assisting him in some capacity.

"I paid for my mistakes, he needs to pay for his. That Magic User and the God of Thunder have no impact in this." Inukimi bit out. Tenseiga barked.

"How did you pay for yours Inukimi? By dying? It seems as if my Lord paid with his blood too." Tenseiga growled out, ears flat.

"I paid by proving myself incapable of protecting the Soul Gem of the Greater Cosmos, I paid by proving myself a fool to Odin, and I paid by watching my only son die." Inukimi's eyes rimmed with blood. Sesshomaru scoffed, she never once held any affection towards him. She was simply blowing a smokescreen to the real issue at hand. What did she mean about Odin?

Alfheim. Loki and Storm God were sent on an extended excursion to Alfheim.

"You warned Odin and advised him not to interfere on our behalf, didn't you Mother? It is why Loki and Storm God sent to Alfheim." This was the first move Sesshomaru deemed wise by his typically overconfident mother. Whoever this other Sesshomaru was would have certainly not wanted Loki and Storm God to get involved.

"So, again, let me put this in plain words. You knew an all-powerful titan was coming to track you down and kill you and everyone else, and you told Odin to shove off?" Barton pressed, face flushing.

"It didn't take much. Odin has never had love for our kind, and while we spoke semi frequently, we were never friendly." Sesshomaru hadn't even known his mother and Odin exchanged words, much less regularly. "I informed him that this Titan's wrath was merely a grudge between old foes. I didn't lie, our ability to access the Astral Plane was very tempting for the Mad Titan to harness. It is truly a unique gift we have solely in yours and my possession. It is why after you were slain I had strike a deal with Odin to take other precautionary measures to prevent the Mad Titan from getting his clumsy, unworthy hands on the Soul Gem, and on our people to enslave them." Inukimi straightened her robe. He noted her legs were becoming more and more transparent.

"Meh, who needs Storm God and that Magic User anyway." Bakusaiga scrunched her nose and crossed her arms.

"Enslavement of the Demons?" Tenseiga echoed, suddenly intrigued, wrath cooling. Sesshomaru stilled, if the Mad Titan had indeed enslaved all the Demons it would certainly explain their absence.

"The Titan thirsted for an army, one he could easily control with the Soul Gem of the Greater Cosmos. In my final hour, I spoke to Odin through the Astral Plane. I implored him to act, otherwise the humans on Earth, and perhaps Asgard would be lost as well. He and I acted together, I hid Sounga on the Astral Plane, and he used the World Tree to seal all of our people in an ice realm far from here. Together, we magicked away all memories and evidence of Demons to deter the Mad Titan from returning. With no prize, and Odin's power amassing, the weakened Mad Titan
and the Other left this planet be. Well, I suppose until they got their hands on the former Prince Loki and learned of the other Cosmic Gem located here." Inukimi sliced a thin smile that ironically reminded him of Loki’s smirk.

Sesshomaru frowned slightly. Odin reviled his people, his mother was leaving out a key component of this story. He would have never agreed to help his mother prevent their annihilation without something valuable in return.

"So, all the other Demons are alive in an ice realm? We aren't the last of our kind?" Bakusaiga jumped in the air, green aura spiking.

"No, you aren't. Which goes back to Sesshomaru's real destiny. Your destiny is to free them from their icy sleep and bring them back to their former glory, away from this accursed planet. Leave this dying planet to its repulsive humans who have dug their own grave and free our people from theirs. You led them to ruin, now it is time to save them from your own weakness." Inukimi passionately barked and Sesshomaru’s eyes narrowed. How dare she still try to pin him into a corner? How dare she imply he was to abandon his word, to turn his back on the people he had given his word to protect?

He clenched his jaw. Yes. Protect.

"No." Sesshomaru stated curtly.

"Your father's spawn of his human weakness, the Hanyou, Inuyasha, is among the frozen. Him along with some of his friends who helped you in the war. Are you saying you’d abandon him to his icy fate?" Inukimi's lips curled upwards and her sharp eyes danced.

"Inuyasha." Sesshomaru whispered unintentionally. He lived. If he was sealed again, he would be the same age as he was five hundred years ago.

"Father, your annoying brother is alive? Why bother saving him? Ugh." Bakusaiga's opinion mostly went ignored.

Inuyasha was alive. He was frozen by of all the repulsive entities, Odin. He didn't know what to make of this. Should he care? He was never really supposed to be responsible for him. He knew not even his father would want him coddling Inuyasha, and he never did. However, Odin interfering with his family was intolerable.

"Does that mean Tessaiga lives as well?" Tenseiga replied which was shot down with a sharp look by Inukimi.

"Wow, you're a real piece of work you know that? I thought his old man was a bad example of narcissistic parenting with the whole ‘weapon of perfection' bit, but you're just as bad, if not worse. You've been trying to manipulate your own son for your own gain from the start of all of this. You basically say you never wanted him, then try to say that him failing a war was on him when you knew it was coming. And now this? You're trying to convince him to let everyone he cares on Earth die just so your perfect little dream comes true? You've set himself up for failure at every turn then expect him to fall in line when it's convenient. Just because your own parents made you get with his dad doesn't mean you can hold it over him." Barton's own purification energy began to ebb out in fuchsia sparks. His own demonic energy reacted, yet he controlled his own.

"You pathetic, dirt bathing Priest! You have no idea what it takes to have real responsibility. Your lifespan is but a blink to us." His mother, enticed to battle again, seemed to be weakening.
He didn't need anyone to speak for him, but he had never met a human who could rankle his mother so. He only could imagine how it would have been if Stark had not betrayed him and he came in his stead. Would he say the same things? However, his mother was right. Barton was untrained and his mother was enfeebled, this altercation could easily go overboard.

"Clint speaks the truth. You have been out of line Inukimi, both my forgers would agree you have been trying to sway my Lord with your own wishes." Tenseiga stepped up, triangle ears flat.

"Grandmother, if you think Father can rule over all the Demons, why do you doubt us defeating this titan?" Bakusaiga stamped her feet. Sesshomaru unspooled his whip and tied up all three of his burdens.

"..." He gave them all a stern glare.

"I really, really should have just waited by the bikes. You know I am going to take a shot in the dark, because you know I'm actually really good at those, and say that live action Jerry Springer isn't what you and Loki did while 'treasure questing'." Barton struggled against his restraints, and his ears pricked up at the mention of the metal dragons.

He would obtain a metal dragon for himself. Perhaps Polly can show him where to acquire one. The machine incited long dormant excitement in him. He didn't see why humans would want to travel any other way. He let all three of the rather infuriating tagalongs loose.

"This is bigger than these humans, the Aesir, and your magic using friend, Loki. Sesshomaru, your father left us a grand burden: the Soul Gem of the Greater Cosmos. Sounga is locked on the Astral Plane and you are the only one in existence who can access it on the Astral Plane. Its other half, in the Meido stone is..." Inukimi trailed off, too sufficiently calm for his tastes.

"Where is the Meido Stone, mother?" Sesshomaru's tone was flat. He was through with her cajoling him into what she wanted him to do. It is his life, not hers, nor his father's any longer. He was done being told what to accomplish and when. This Sesshomaru would do as he pleases.

"Mephisto stole the Meido Stone from me when he cut me down out here in this wasteland. Surely you remember him, the Fire Demon who was so eager to go to Asgard as your envoy? He betrayed us at the eleventh hour. He seized an opportunity to betray his own kind when I was working with Odin to erase the human's memories and spirit away our kind. He wanted save his own spine and cut a deal with the Titan... Are you intent on getting revenge for your poor murdered mother?!" Inukimi's eyes lit up mockingly and Sesshomaru's ears lowered in warning. He had no such desire in the least. If she found herself on the edge of Mephisto's blade it was due to her own folly to trust such obviously unscrupulous filth.

Fire Demons. Really. Loki would be sure to remember him.

"Do you offer me anything of worth mother?" Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles. What a waste of time this has been. The enemy having the Meido Stone was just confirmed, and his mother, in proper fashion, and struck almost every one of his last nerves.

Inukimi clenched her fists, as if contemplating something and instead reached deep in her elaborate yukata sleeve and pulled out a long strand of snow white beads. They shone like ocean pearls and resembled a rosary that a monk or priest would wear.

His mother approached him, and held out the beaded rosary. Sesshomaru recognized it instantly as the beads that once held the Meido Stone.
"This strand is called the Cosmic Leyline, is made of the fangs and bones of our ancestors and has been passed down our bloodline to guide us on the Astral Plane. Bakusaiga can lead you on the Astral Plane. With this, you can perfect your true power to guard Sounga and awaken our people." She handed the beads to Bakusaiga who wound them around her left wrist just like a Monk would. Sesshomaru looked his mother in her eyes, gold on gold.

"Oh my dear son, I simply wish to save you from an untimely death. This ardor you hold for these humans, it's your father's vice. His absurd idiosyncrasy of loving them will spell your demise as well." Inukimi accused. Sesshomaru's ears rose. Love? What an audacious claim!

"Now just a moment—" Tenseiga was cut off by his mother.

"Bakusaiga was half right Sesshomaru. You do have an intended mate, but he is not a former intended at all." Sesshomaru stilled. He had hoped that his mother had thought Bakusaiga was speaking in exaggeration when she brought it up earlier and had missed it. She had not. She had waited till the opportune time.

Love though? Outlandish.

"When I looked at your left arm I confirmed it, the magenta markings on your wrists and arms have changed color, as they are apt to do when one finds a mate. My markings would have changed if your father's and my mating was a true match. Yours are now crimson. They must be symbolic about your chosen human mate." Inukimi iced over the word human, and Tenseiga bristled again.

Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed in thought; Stark did mention that his markings matched his armored suits after their spar in the grass field.

Sesshomaru had wanted this revelation to evoke more of a shocked reaction out of him, but in reality he was not that surprised. It was as if something in his blood craved seeing Stark. His youki also thrived in him as it had no one previously before. He deduced that something primal, something driven by his youki instincts had chosen him as a mate. It was confirmed with him when he coupled with Stark the second time and he told him that he was his anomaly.

Anomaly. It wasn't a word he used often. Yet, it was oddly appropriate.

Stark was most certainly an anomaly for a human. He was also most certainly an anomaly for himself. Never before had he thought he would choose a mate, let alone a human. Sesshomaru understood himself to be a solitary Demon; he preferred avoiding the company of others.

Especially a race he understood to be weaker than himself: humans. Yet, Stark, a clearly social human was his anomaly.

Was.

He ceased to be when Stark made the glaring error of coupling with another human. Yes, Stark had initially conveyed to him that their relations were a mere dalliance, however he was certain the other night had amended that. He was confident that Stark had returned his intentions, and had understood he had been serious in his inclination, and dedicated to pursuing an actual courtship.

He was mistaken, but he was confident that he had not misread what Stark implied the other night. He was positive something had changed Stark's mind about him, and about a committed courtship. Loki had been correct, and most assuredly was secretly gloating about it. Sesshomaru should have listened, and not had given into his unruly and unfortunate emotions and instincts.
He loathed not trusting his instincts. He relied on them; they had saved him from countless battles. When he had no one, he had his instincts. They were at times, all he had.

"And according to Bakusaiga, your intended has decided you were a disappointment and left you for a human. All the more better. You are too young to mate, especially to a human. Were you struck on the head? To choose an individual of not only inferior breeding, but an inferior species of second-rate intelligence and strength? Obviously you chose poorly since he decided to bed another human instead of staying true to you. What a witless simpleton, that Tony Stark." Inukimi's face, for the first time, twisted into a truly ugly sneer. She spat Stark's name as if she knew who he was.

How dare she say his name?!

Sesshomaru clenched his fists; his talons punctured his palms, drawing blood.

"Whoa, Tony is a lot of things, but simple isn't one of them." Barton challenged. He didn't need his defense, and neither did Stark. Maybe it was for the best Stark didn't come himself, deep down he knew his mother would never approve of him. His ears lowered in anger.

How dare she speak of Stark as if she had an inkling of what they had?

How dare she speak of Stark as if she had any idea about him?

So what if she managed to see him get slain? She knew nothing of his boundless intelligence, his passion for defending his realm and his friends and—once himself. She knew not of his loyalty to those under his protection, and his ingenuity, his strength, his odd humor, the effort he put into finding him when he would go off alone, which he hadn't really thought about until just now. The fascinating D.E.M.O.N.S. device he made from his youki, not even to admit the hear devices he made on his own volition.

Sesshomaru's youki spiked, blue and true and swirled around him as he approached his mother.

"This Sesshomaru chooses my couplings as I see fit. Your opinions on them do not matter to me." Sesshomaru chose his words carefully. He didn't want to give his mother any more ammunition.

Beside him, he could feel Tenseiga's youki bristling.

"Clearly. You are who you surround yourself with Sesshomaru. Maybe that's why you continue to be weak and a disappointment. They're holding you back." Inukimi's eyes sliced over to Barton and Tenseiga had finally had enough.

"You are the true disappointment Inukimi. I've born witness to many a time where you could have aided your son, YOUR SON, with defending the Western Lands from the North, battling against Naraku, or at very least informing him of his abilities. You did none of those when we saw you when he went into the Demonic Underworld. You showed no emotion when he was about to be slain from it. You imperiled Rin to teach my Lord a lesson and then saved her as if it was a favor! You speak of poor choices in friends, but it was your trusted companion who forsook you and stole your precious Meido Stone! Just because you have made poor choices in your life and who you surround yourself with does not mean you should project them onto YOUR SON." Tenseiga's words were laced with a poison more potent than was contained in the bullets that struck him the other day. His cerulean youki coalesced into a dragon and his gold eyes bled a sinister scarlet. Sesshomaru swore he saw his father's markings flash on Tenseiga's jaw. It was rare to see
Tenseiga's dragon strike form; it remained impressive.

Sesshomaru unclenched fists and his ears raised back up.

His mother's eyes widened and she took small step back. She should. Tenseiga could slay her spirit. Over the years Tenseiga had proven his worth time and time again. Tenseiga voicing an opinion to his mother that he could never say was one of those times. He appreciated Loki's gift to him now more than ever. Yes, he still resented Tenseiga's praise of all things human and his empathy of them, but his merits more than made up for those irritating tendencies. Aside from Loki, Tenseiga had been literally by his side the longest. Even if he couldn't or wouldn't save Kagura.

"Tenseiga, stand down, that is sufficient." Sesshomaru's voice rippled like silk and almost instantly Tenseiga calmed, though the dark look loomed over his features, much like Loki's did when scorned.

"Man Tenseiga, remind me never to make you angry." Bakusaiga murmured, eyes large as plates that Stark served dinner upon. Tenseiga would never harm Bakusaiga; she should know that.

"What he said, and she said." Barton agreed sternly, and Bakusaiga lifted her small hand for a high five which Clint delivered. So, Bakusaiga had picked up Storm God's bizarre ritual as well.

"You're strong Sesshomaru. The strongest Demon crafted. You have a duty to protect the two halves of the Soul Gem from being reunited. You have a duty to free our people, including your foul Hanyou brother. You cannot uphold your duties and defend the humans. Let Odin defend them." At his mother's request Sesshomaru's eyes hardened.

"Odin, defend what is mine? Never." Sesshomaru's voice held a dark, obsidian-sharp edge; his own aura swirling. Odin, that despicable, weak, blind, old fool dare hope to topple a Titan? Steal his triumph; his kill? Odin couldn't hope to do so. He should have bitten his head off in his true form when he had the chance all those centuries ago.

The Mad Titan's head was his claim. The defense of the realm was his uphold. Stark was his to...his no longer.

"You choose the responsibility of those dirt eaters, whose life span is but a candle flame, over the kind you led to war and personally failed? One path leads to certain destruction and death, the other to glory and power! Do not...let me lose my only son twice!" Inukimi's shocked voice flowered high in the air. She was being purposely dramatic, but he caught a glimpse of a deep melancholy in her voice. He doubted that she cared that much about his own personal welfare. However, on the other hand, she did suspend her soul for five hundred years just to speak to him. She did prevent the Other from interfering with his mind, unasked.

She did save Rin, unasked.

She did save Inuyasha, unasked.

Regardless, why was he still here anyway? He got what he wanted, the Cosmic Leyline to the Astral Plane and answers about the Meido Stone.

"Tenseiga, Bakusaiga to me. We are leaving." Sesshomaru had more than enough of his mother's instruction and ploys. Tenseiga nodded and immediately went back in his sheath, waiving at Barton as he transformed back into his sword form.

Sesshomaru saw Barton head bobble as he opened and shut his mouth a few times, mimicking his mother's babbling. Sesshomaru suppressed a smirk.
"So soon? We have more to discuss. Like about your friend Loki and the Tesseract." His mother's legs had now almost faded away. Was she that concerned about dying alone that she brought up that nonsense about some other Cosmic Gem and Loki?

"That does not concern me. This Sesshomaru does as he pleases." Sesshomaru stated blandly and tossed his hair.

"Yeah, we don't need any stupid gems. We are strong enough on our own and we will prove it. We are gonna smash that Titan, blast Mjolnir to pieces, and make my Father's FORMER intended to think twice about coupling with a human!" Bakusaiga grinned, flashing her tiny fangs. Tenseiga turned his back on Inukimi to face Barton, surely a measured sign of disrespect.

"I will say my Lord, it may be well due to at least speak with Stark. He cares intensely for you, I can feel it, otherwise I would have never let him wield me." Tenseiga advised and Sesshomaru nearly rolled his eyes. "It was lovely to finally meet you Clint." Tenseiga smiled warmly, triangle ears twitching before transforming into a ball of light and resuming his sword form on his left side where he belonged.

"Same Barton! You rock, keep practicing your magic, I'm sure you will get at least sort of good at it, or die trying!" Bakusaiga grinned and gave Barton a 'thumbs up', another pose she had surely observed the humans do. She too glowed green and jettisoned to her sword form on his hip.

"Yeah, thanks for the vote of confidence Fancy Pants Junior. Let's get out of here, graves always gave me the creeps. Besides, the Ducatis are waiting, and I'm sure SHIELD is going to wonder where I am since apparently I don't get reception in a Demon Tomb. I should switch providers. Nationwide coverage my bow-hand, Sprint." Barton rubbed his palms together. He didn't think Stark had a motorcycle. Sesshomaru inwardly frowned. Why did all of his thoughts constantly circle back to Stark?

'I don't want to entertain the thought that his mother was right and I made a poor decision, but I should have considered making Stark my intended more carefully. Courtship is a complicated game to him, not straight forward like Demonic Mating. Monogamy is perhaps a thing of the past with humans. Clearly he had no intention of seeing me for who I am. I was a foolish pup to take what he said to heart when we last coupled, that he saw me in any way a special lover. I cannot believe I shared that part of myself while washing, or assisted him in his nightmares which are so similar to Rin's. Tenseiga suggesting I speak to Stark rings of desperation.' Sesshomaru slipped off into thought, regretting his vulnerability.

"Sesshomaru!" his mother called from behind him. He turned slightly, she had never said his name like that before, with such an urgent, dark beckoning. "Don't be like your father. Don't die in a battle over your lover. If you stay and fight the Titan on Earth...I will...I...I will see you in the afterlife soon!" Inukimi waved, fuchsia lips curled in a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. Fight for only his lover? She indeed was working hard to bait him.

"Goodbye, Mother." Is all Sesshomaru said as he walked out and through the barrier. It was if to say her prediction could not possibly be true. The milky white Cosmic Leyline dangled from Bakusaiga's hilt, clacking.

"Your mom definitely seems like the type to bake Christmas cookies with you, then throw them all out in front of you saying she just then went gluten free. I mean, she could put sociopaths to shame." Barton offered and Sesshomaru tilted his head at him.

"You are the first human she has met to address her so. You got under her skin." Sesshomaru watched as Barton shot a cabled arrow high up in the air, anchoring it in the salt and with a good
tug he began to walk up.

"Well from the sound of things she eats most humans she sees… Wait have you eaten one? No. Actually. Going to take my own advice for Bruce on this one, don't tell me." Barton turned his head and Sesshomaru flashed a fang and purposefully let his eyes bleed red in the corners.

"You're a cruel son of a bitch you know that?" Barton edged away from the Demon Lord who was matching his slow pace out of the hole.

"The statement is accurate." Sesshomaru ghosted a smile, he approved of Loki’s lover and his oddly appropriate word choices.

"...oh. Yeah, Fury said that too. Oh wait this reminds me. When Loki was you, Thor admitted that even though he never tried 'to bed' you, he did find you lovely and worthy." Barton sniggered and Sesshomaru's eyebrows shot up. The Storm God said that to Loki who he thought was himself?

"...As he should. He, however, shall never have the honor." Sesshomaru's eyes glinted and Barton laughed so hard he almost lost his footing.

'If I recall correctly, Storm God always chased partners far exceeding his own merits.' Sesshomaru suppressed a dark grin.

"I shouldn't have said anything; you don't need the ego boost. Though he was right about you giving birth to a bouncing baby girl—" Barton dodged a whip strike at his side, he just smirked cheekily.

"Watch your tongue Archer." Sesshomaru and Barton had nearly reached the top of the steep grade to a brilliant blue sky.

"Or what? You'll eat me? Because I know I won't taste good, and my temperamental, over protective lover may ju—" was the last Sesshomaru heard as he cut the arrow cable with his claws and he heard a curse and a long scrape of salt.

Sesshomaru dodged an arrow, then another. Then watched as another one with a cable flew up and attached to the salty slope. He allowed it to gain purchase; he wished to leave.

"I'm gonna push your prissy, Fancy Pants'd ass back down the hole you dug. Just wait till I get up there." Sesshomaru looked at the mountains in the distance and the expanse of salt. He let his sense of hearing flood outwards. The mountains near stood crisp and clean, though rocky and snowcapped, much dislike his Lands.

'Maybe I will stay here, Maybe I won't. I promised Rin I would retrieve Ah Un, yet I also promised I would stay.' Sesshomaru, seeing that Barton was still struggling up the steep incline, allowed himself a long silent sigh.

"That was a lot more fun the second time." Barton slapped salt off of his hands, putting his sunglasses back on. Sesshomaru, instead took to air as a ball of light and transformed again into his true form.

He curled his giant paws into the tacky, but smooth salt. It felt oddly refreshing. His gaze settled on a human who darted upwind.

'Hmmm. Ally. Barton. Intended of Loki. Must not harm.' Sesshomaru's thoughts came through as spurts in his true form as he reburied his mother's grave. Her tomb, the pearl had long disintegrated away. It didn't take long, even with allowing his saliva to drip over the slightly mounded entryway,
sealing it. He transformed back as quickly as he could, standing now before Barton, who was on his phone.

"Yeah, just got done treasure questing….he buried a few bones. No actually we got a necklace made out of baby teeth or something stereotypical demonic. Oh, and I think I met the one woman who might be more terrifying than you." Sesshomaru eyes narrowed. "We will be wheels up soon, gotta get back to the Jet, we should be home by dinnerish, maybe 19:00 hours. Out." Barton grinned, hanging up and walking to his motorcycle. Sesshomaru allowed him that luxury, he did after all agree to come out to this salted wasteland to speak to his insufferable mother.

"You ready to head back?" Barton inanely asked. of course he wished not to linger in this place, although the air was far more fresh than in New York. It reminded him of places he found when he left on his excursion for a few days.

Sesshomaru nodded once and approached his motorcycle, insuring the staff of two heads rested on it where he left it. The metal dragon was indeed exquisite and the precise color red he wanted. He straddled it, like he would occasionally Ah-Un, and gingerly turned the key. The rumble and throttle of the engine beneath him reminded him dearly of Ah Un's breathing and movements, though much louder and obviously mechanical. He looked through the wind visor and watched as Barton pulled out in front of him.

Sesshomaru didn't look back as he did the same. His adrenaline jetted through his veins.

His pulse raced and his youki tingled, he allowed it to spill out, leaving a blue streak behind him. He allowed his eyes to glow, pupils set ahead. He pulled up on the reins and let metal dragon buck in the air. Changing through the various speed settings was challenging at first, but he had a hang of it now. Sesshomaru allowed the smallest of smiles creep onto his face and Tenseiga, surprisingly hummed.

The wind rushed past his ears, reminding him of Kagura. He didn't hear her voice here either. The ride back to the Jet was entirely too short. Were he a thief he would try to stash his steed in the Jet somehow.

"You're all prepped and ready to go Agent Barton, and gotta say, Mr Nirvana, I'm a big fan." Sesshomaru turned his eyes at the well-built human in an icy glare. He did not need more human attention.

"Yeah, he isn't a big talker, thanks for prepping us." Sesshomaru followed Barton into the jet, and he replicated every step he did just like before, and he noticed just as Barton did that they didn't properly fuel the Jet.

"Ugh, new recruits can't do anything without hand-holding, we should be fine on a half-tank. We will just have to refuel the Jet properly in New York." Barton sighed and Sesshomaru nodded.

They took off, slightly less shaky than previously. Sesshomaru praised himself inwardly; this skill may be useful later. He picked up a slightly different sound coming from the rear of the Jet. They cruised in comfortable silence for perhaps an hour or so, listening to music of Sesshomaru's choice since Barton chose the music on the arriving trip. Sesshomaru chose Stone Temple Pilots, Interstate Love Song.

'Leavin' on a southern train
Only yesterday you lied
Promises of what I seemed to be
Only watched the time go by
All of these things you said to me
Breathing is the hardest thing to do.
With all I've said and
all that's dead for you
You lied—Goodbye.'

"Has anyone straight up asked you what you want to do?" Barton asked out of the blue and
Sesshomaru's ears pricked up in pure confusion. What did he mean by that? Inuyasha may have
asked him that a few times when he attempted to acquire Tessaiga. The vibration noise still hadn't
ceased, odd. Perhaps the Jet incurred damage, but no gauges read any abnormalities.

"Like, your mom and your dad seemed hell bent on making you do what they want. Has anyone
asked you what you want?" Barton supplemented and Sesshomaru shifted his gaze to him. Why
was he asking this?

"It is a needless question to ask." Sesshomaru still heard the noise, it remained steady even though
the engines were operating at much higher speed as they continued to cruise East.

"It should be asked it's your life, not your narcissistic parents' to use as a rook on a chessboard." Barton snapped but Sesshomaru could tell it wasn't directed at him. It was quiet for a few
moments.

"My parents both loathed strategy games. It may have been their one commonality." Sesshomaru
mused.

"Yeah, my parent's were more of a fan of NASCAR's Chase Elliot than Chess too. New topic.
Were you close with your brother? You seemed concerned about him back there." Barton stumbled
and Sesshomaru's ears flicked. His curiosity was beginning to wear thin on him.

He raised an eyebrow.

"I mean apparently he tried to cut off your arm and was sealed to a tree. Are you gonna go find him
on Hoth? If so, bring Cap, it's right up his alley." Barton asked two questions and Sesshomaru
nearly sighed through his nose.

"Those are inquiries I will not answer." Sesshomaru replied evenly.

The vibrations he sensed had now increased in velocity.

"Don't know you yourself huh? Well, I all I know is if I had the chance to see my brother Nate
again I'd—" Sesshomaru put a finger to his lips. He needed Barton to concentrate on the present,
not the past nor future.

"I hear a continued vibration. It comes from the rear of the Jet. It was not present upon our arrival." Sesshomaru cut a gaze over to Barton and he sighed heavily.

"I'll check it out, one of the recruits must have jostled something lose or broke something." Barton
moved to the back of the plane and Sesshomaru attempted to maintain their course smoothly. He
heard a shimming of metal and a clank. His ears picked up a staggering step back on the metal.

"Oh fuck…fuck it's a bomb. We got no time!" Sesshomaru didn't need a reference to know what
that meant. He whipped around to see a pale Barton. Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles, toxin
flooding out of his right hand as he sprung back in a flash, grabbing Barton around the waist with
his left arm. Swiftly, he carved a hissing, bubbling green circle on the bottom of the Jet.

'This may have been exactly where Stark and I coupled on the floor.' He willed his toxin to corrode faster, as if to destroy any evidence it ever happened as well as ensure their survival. The circle worked its way through and with a strong kick he punched the metal circle from the jet's hull and flung them both through it, getting clear of the engine backwash.

The deafening explosion above them reflexively caused Sesshomaru to place his back towards the Jet as they freefell through the sky, his youki shielding him from shrapnel. He could hear Barton curse and yell as he angled his fall. Sesshomaru calculated his height, around 6,000 meters. He should be able to land without much injury to his person without revealing his flight capabilities.

Sesshomaru buffered their descent somewhat with his youki but he knew due to the force of the explosion they were falling too fast for him to absorb the impact enough to protect Barton.

"I should have written my obit!" Barton screamed as Sesshomaru righted himself so he was feet first going into the forest. Right as he descended into the canopy of oak trees he wrapped Barton up in his pelt like a cocoon and threw him into the air. Sesshomaru took out some branches hard, but they did not injure him beyond a small bruise or scrape.

Sesshomaru hit the ground in a kneel with a branch quaking thud. Broken ankle. He immediately sprung back up, grabbing the pelt and landing gracefully on the ground with it, favoring his left leg.

As he unwound Barton from the pelt he healed his broken right ankle with his youki.

"Let's never repeat that." Barton stood a bit wobbly and Sesshomaru looked up at the smoke cloud and the wreckage that fell around one hundred fifty meters from their location in a field.

"Hmmm." Sesshomaru hummed, he couldn't think of a time he had to fall from such a height before.

"Thanks, I would have never been able to 'chute out in time." Barton jumped a few times, taking a deep breath and Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow, did he thank this Sesshomaru?

"I would not allow any damage to befall you, despite your interrogations." Sesshomaru pulsed his youki out faintly to detect only humans roaming about.

Not unusual.

"That's sweet, my knight in fluffy armor… But seriously that bomb, I've seen them before. It was connected to the fuel line. It's why they only filled the jet up halfway with fuel. Jet fumes are more flammable than the fuel itself and it was set up to explode when we reached a certain coordinate, with a certain level of fuel." Sesshomaru turned to Barton, he could hear noisy humans filter in formation through the trees some distance off, he could smell their urgency, seriousness, and nervousness.

Not unusual.

"I know who did this." Barton's voice hard like steel. Sesshomaru lowered his ears when Barton clenched his fists; he could not afford the archer to get emotional here. "SHIELD were the only ones who knew we were at the Salt Flats, and that bomb was SHIELD standard. Something shady is going down." That caught Sesshomaru's attention. So this SHIELD sought to slay this Sesshomaru? Sesshomaru put his hand out to still Barton. He would capture one of these infantrymen.
"We should contact your Captain." Sesshomaru murmured, barely audible and Barton put his back to a tree, hearing the advancing forces now.

"They'd have already tapped my phone and the Tower by now." Barton destroyed his phone in case it was being tracked through GPS. "We would tip them off to whatever they are planning if we called from my phone. For all we know this is a trap to lure Loki here. No doubt SHIELD sent a collection and sweeper team to collect our bodies or to finish us off. I doubt this is Fury though." Barton whispered and Sesshomaru hid, waiting for an unfortunate infantryman get too close. Barton seemed to pick up on what he was attempting and also got low.

"You might find this funny, but if you go East from here like two miles you'd reach the hick town, Marengo, I grew up in. It's just a day of family reunions isn't it?" Barton chuckled huskily, but it sounded brittle. It was obvious he had no desire to return there.

Did humans in this time mistreat their offspring, and if so, why? They had enough food and entertainment at their disposal and no need for many warriors.

"You know, there are towns called Thor and town called Hawkeye in Iowa. Shame we didn't land near those towns." Barton's face lit up in mischief. Loki was indeed a poor influence on the archer.

"Indeed." Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes. Ever patient, he waited for around ten minutes for a hapless scout to get too close. He looked to the lowest branch of the tree in front of him and got an idea.

In a graceful, deft movement he sprung out his whip of light over the tree branch and caught the infantryman by his neck, lifting him up to his tiptoes, fingers scrabbling at the whip in an attempt to scream or get free. He dropped his gun and Barton immediately kicked it away.

The captive agent spun to face Barton, a pink pallor forming on his face and Barton smirked.

"Hey there buddy! You know how this works, you tell me what you know or we play a game. And let me tell you, I've been playing a lot of them today." Barton caught on quick, Sesshomaru remained hidden from the captive.

"Go to hell Barton. You're a brainwashed, washed-up, has been!" The captive rasped out and Sesshomaru lifted him by a centimeter. His feet basically dangling now.

"Aw, see this is classic 'good cop, bad cop'. I'm the good cop, this is my backyard after all, almost literally. The 'bad cop' is the Demon Lord over there. And honestly, he isn't really a cop; he's just bad." Barton thumbed towards Sesshomaru who stepped out from behind the tree, left hand full of whip, the other dripping of toxin.

"You don't scare me, Barbie!" Sesshomaru cocked his head to the side and decided to employ an unused tactic. He opened his eyes wide, pupils constricting and released a gust of invisible Killing Intent at their prisoner, catching Barton a bit incidentally in the crossfire.

The prisoner's pants darkened and dampened. Liquid ran down his leg and the stench of urine filled the air. The captive's pupils were pinpricks in fright and he flailed in the air. Barton shivered unintentionally.

"Barton, would you like a leather jacket? Or perhaps a chair?" Sesshomaru deadpanned and lengthened his talons, running them along the chest of their captive, slicing through his knife-proof Kevlar like a laser through cotton. The captive's face turned purple.

"I told you no clothes remember! I told you that when the 'Scamtastic Four' left!" Barton
stammered a bit, and the captive shook his head vehemently.

"Chair then." Sesshomaru drew blood and the captive found his strangled voice. Sesshomaru lowered him back down the centimeter so his feet touched.

"Project Ultron! Project Ultron! He wanted Barton dead, not you. He wanted you alive! Barton and the Blue Duck were loose ends! He's after Merlin because he made a deal with the Chitauri!" The captive wheezed and sputtered, body writhing.

"Who is he?! Why did he make a deal with Thanos? What for?" Barton barked, pursing his lips in palpable anger.

"I don't know who he is, that's all I know, please!" Sesshomaru side eyed Barton who motioned him to let him down. Sesshomaru was about to slay him when Tenseiga pulsed.

Tenseiga, too soft-hearted for his own good.

Sesshomaru instead knocked him out and released the whip. Why Barton and Tenseiga wished him alive Sesshomaru had no idea, but he wouldn't awaken for a while.

"This isn't good. Those are code names. The Blue Duck is Doctor Selvig…blue for Tesseract, duck because he's a quack…it's ok I'll explain the reference later. Merlin is the scepter that Loki used to control everyone. We have got to move, if they're trying to off me then they're definitely gonna try to kill him too. Someone in SHIELD betrayed us and is going to give the Chitauri the damn scepter. Loki…what if they're after Loki? The Tower could be in danger…" Barton's eyes unfocused, staring at nothing, wide and wild. Sesshomaru straightened, so some of his army had defected with the spies.

"Where is this scepter? If you don't know, I can scry it here and go intercept it." Sesshomaru asked flatly, preparing for a scry. Barton began rifling through the agent's clothing, coming up with nothing. He will prevent that scepter from falling into their enemy's hands.

"Only Nat would have clearance to know where it is, and I bet it's nowhere near Iowa so save the crystal ball act for later. We need to contact her. If I know SHIELD they're making their move now. Loki can teleport to the scepter's location, but he should stay away from it. The scepter is no joke. I won't let The Other get his hands on it again. " Barton ran his hand through his hair and Sesshomaru could smell the faintest whiff of panic come from Barton. He frowned and dug into his yukata, standing over Barton.

"Can you use my phone?" Sesshomaru held out his cellphone and Barton bolted upwards, eyes wide in surprise.

"You have a cellphone?! Since when? No, we will get into the how later. Yeah I can use it, SHIELD probably doesn't know about it, but we still need to call someone to call the tower. They will know our voices; SHIELD has upped their voice recognition game." Barton took the phone, looking through it and his face lit up.

"You said Bruce met Polly right? You think he'd take her call? We can call your ice cream lady; I have a code that only Nat and I use. I can tell it to Polly and she can call Bruce." Barton's pulse began to lower and Sesshomaru listened, the other infantryman grew closer.

"Leave your message with Polly, we should make haste away from here and back to the tower, it would be best if they believed us dead for as long as possible." Sesshomaru toed the passed out captive into a nearby shrubbery.
Barton called Polly and got an answer in two rings, he explained the situation, and left the message, telling her to write it down word for word.

"She called me Mint Chocolate Chip, I have you to blame for that." Barton crossed his arms and Sesshomaru remained expressionless. "So we need to steal a car, or something, then make our way to an airfield—" Sesshomaru cut him off by first grabbing back his phone, then Barton roughly by his shoulder.

"We need no jet to fly." Sesshomaru squared his shoulders to Barton.

"Well, I guess a helicopter could do, but it would take ages though… wait, what do you have in mind?" Barton tilted his head in confusion.

"I have had enough of your metal vehicles. I shall take us back." Sesshomaru flared his youki out into a perfect blue pool beneath them.

"You can fly?!" Sesshomaru answered Barton's eyebrows hit his hairline. Sesshomaru wasted no time in grabbing his other shoulder and turned them both into a white sphere of light, shooting off like a comet to the East.

"Who knows you can fly?" Barton's voice came from all over; their bodies glowed and somewhat translucent. Sesshomaru hadn't traveled with anyone in this form ever before; it was exceedingly taxing and slowed him down considerably.

"Rin and Jaken." Sesshomaru answered simply then Barton's eyes burned in realization.

"Wait so not only does Loki not know, but we could have flown out of the jet instead of free falling, and me oh-so-manly wrapped in your fur boa?!" Barton face palmed. "I should just really hand my man card over to Nat." Barton groaned and for the life of him Sesshomaru had no idea what he referenced. He had seemed satisfied with the way he handled the fall from the jet just minutes ago.

Fickle humans.

"I only use my abilities if absolutely necessary. Flying, even by myself, drains me, and the more of my abilities that are secret the more advantageous it is." Sesshomaru's eyes glinted in slight mirth, accelerating towards the East, letting his nose guide the way.

"Paranoid, prissy Fancy Pants." Sesshomaru eyed Barton critically. He did not need his opinion on his ever-ready battle alertness.

"Would you prefer to walk?" Sesshomaru challenged, voice holding no venom and Barton sighed.

"I'd prefer if my own team didn't want me dead and my favorite bow didn't get blown up. I'll take what I can get." Barton's sharp eyes strained to see the semi-translucent light that streaked by them leaving a slight glittery trail in the afternoon sky.

Sesshomaru could smell the confusion and slight anxiety waft off Barton and his ears lowered.

'His anxiety could be from thinking Stark's fortress is a target as well. I best make haste back to assist in its defense.' Sesshomaru urged his light form faster, stopping only once to pick yellow daffodils for Rin.

Chapter End Notes
Hello! I live! I have found my groove again after going through a pretty rough spring. I hope you enjoyed this one :)

Also, there are actually towns in Iowa called Hawkeye and Thor, hilarious.

Thanks for all who have continued to kudos, bookmark, and comment on my story, it means so so so much. I'm finally getting past some anxiety and personal issues so please stick around!

Please let me know what you think!

-TL
Tony and the Water Demon (Part I)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tony and the Water Demon (part I)

 *(*)

Tony found himself sitting in his kitchen with only Jaken, the least likely member of the Tower's newest misfit brigade to want his company.

Well, that was if you didn't count the five Chicago Blackhawk Roombas he impulsively ordered. He was pretty sure the Roombas were swarming in formation against him. He didn't know how they could be programed that way, but he swore everything was simply not going his way, Roombas included.

He should have just made some himself, but he had his hands 'busy'.

Jaken eyed him. He eyed him back. Tony could easily do petty.

It's not like he wanted him around either.

Not only was he completely oblivious to anything that wasn't Sailor Moon, but he had what he assumed to be the intelligence of a B-movie zombie.

No wait, gremlin.

Having little in common with Toady was a considerable understatement. Though Tony had to admit it was pretty damn funny he beat Point Break so many times in Mario Kart. Tony forgot he even had the game, maybe Nat or Clint must have brought it over.

Since just when had his Tower had become a catch-all for junk?!

Another Roomba bumped him, Jonathan Quick. He was losing it.

Appetite gone, Tony simply stared at the pancakes Loki made him. Like he and Loki were now suddenly best friends that made breakfast for each other. He couldn't get into how messed up in his head that even sounded. Tony's stomach had tied itself into knots and his chest felt damp and dark even though he had gotten exactly what he wanted.

"Operation: Hit it and 'Sho'get it" is officially complete.' Tony inwardly groaned, how he wished that dick Loki had let him explain himself the night before.

How he wished that he remembered that Sailor-fucking-Moon told him after that he could smell when people got frisky.

Apparently he smelled exactly like Berkley, no, Christine. Didn't matter. He apparently smelled just like 'Whoever her face' Everhart reporter for Vanity Fair and her play it safe perfume, Viktor Rolfe Flowerbomb perfume.

Where Sesshomaru smelled like a memorable autumn supercell he once weathered in the Rocky Mountains, she smelled like a delicious bouquet of all the right things.
After a morning that more than confirmed that the current obsession was doing the dirty with a master assassin in his own house; he was going to cut loose at the Gala.

Especially since he had received some chatter from some of his old weapons associates that Justin Hammer got some serious cashflow from out of nowhere and was rebuilding his shitty empire. Of all the fucking nerve. The same guy who tried to kill him was now trying to profit off of an intergalactic invasion.

There was just no justice in the world.

Flying first class to Kazakhstan and throwing the rest of your money into the perpetually burning fire crater there was a better way for the average joe to spend their 401k than funding Justin Hammer.

Once Tony figured out the current mess that was SHIELD’s spies, and a prissy, pissed off Demon Lord and his squirrelly, roofie-happy best friend, he’d tackle Justin Hammer.

Most definitely even physically tackle Justin Hammer.

So, after some very necessary smoozing, courting, business deals for D.E.M.O.N.S., and of course shameless flirting and Chivas Royal, she emerged.

Tony could tell she had probably spent the better part of an hour and a half meticulously styling her hair, picking out just the right shape-hugging dress, and the precise set of false eyelashes to make him do a double take.

He did.

A really nice Balenciaga number, sapphire blue, clung to every curve and gave him a good, but tasteful peek of her cleavage. He thanked whatever being in the cosmos that she wasn't wearing red or white.

She strode to him in sky high stilettos that he pegged as Jimmy Choos. She raised a pencil-perfect eyebrow and palmed her matching clutch.

"Pittsburgh. Not exactly your style Mr. Stark." She cornered him at the bar and ordered a vodka tonic. If it was a gin tonic he'd have made her order something else.

"Pittsburgh brought itself from the ashes of a dwindling coal dependent economy to become a rising beacon of tech and green energy. Not sure what could be more my style." Tony had practiced that. He looked down his nose at her.

"That practiced speech could work on some of your brown-nosers here, but not me." She didn't look impressed.

Tony smirked.

"Guess not, Berkley." Tony replied slowly, sipping his scotch. Debating in his head what he really wanted.

She was practically everything a certain Demon Lord wasn't, down to the hardware.

"Brown. Not Berkley." She finally unleashed a killer smile. She knew how to use her charms, that
was for sure.

This was comfortable. He could fall back into this routine.

He and Sesshomaru had never agreed to not sleep with anyone else, but that didn't stop Tony from getting absolutely irrational with anger over the prospect that Sesshomaru could be having sex with someone else. He had to break free of the complications he had gotten himself mixed up in.

They weren't going to amount to anything; he had to set his own mind straight. He and Sesshomaru never stood a chance of being anything more than fuck buddies. Right? Even if they did...it wasn't the right play for him.

Now, she was someone he could leave in the morning....someone he could use and not feel a lick bad about it. that was right. He knew she was using him too to get a juicy tip for a story about the invasion, Loki, or maybe even Sesshomaru. He wouldn't say a thing: loose lips sink spaceships.

But that didn't mean that he wouldn't let her think so. He's rather chew the glass that Thunder Muscles and Snake Brain regularly broke than give away anything about Sesshomaru.

Even if he was fucking Clint, which he didn't want to care or think about.

So, after a few (ok for him more than just a few) drinks they ended up in front of her hotel room door. She had purposely stayed at the Renaissance hotel the Gala was hosted in.

Room 808.

He pushed her against her own hotel room door, and she didn't resist the force as much as he expected.

She was a vision. And willing, more than willing, she invited him up, not the other way around. He didn't have to think of any sort of elaborate plan like he had to with a certain Dog Demon.

Tony wasted no time in bringing his lips to hers. It was so much easier when he didn't have to go to his tiptoes to kiss someone. She was shorter than him even with the Jimmy Choos.

She tasted sweet mixed with the flat, snap note of tonic. Could be way worse. He instinctively avoided sharp fangs with his eager tongue, but found that she didn't have any. Took some of the danger out of it, but of course none of the fun. Of course.

He waited for the unique buzz of youki to tingle through his mouth and the base of his throat, but nothing ever happened.

That was fine; he didn't need it. He didn't before the Demon Lord fell into his life and Tony Stark didn't 'need' on principle.

He pulled back and semi drunkenly planted kisses up her neck. She tasted like he knew she would. He knew this. This was old hat.

Tony bit down on an earlobe, and was a fraction annoyed about the half karat sapphire earring preventing him from really biting and sucking. In the end, the move elicited a predicable moan, that while a little high and vocal for his tastes, wasn't unattractive.

He didn't know how to feel about how her ears were rounded like his and not a tantalizing point he had come to appreciate. Obviously his own ears were round too. Nothing wrong with round ears because there was certainly nothing wrong with him.
He pulled back and stared her down in her hazel eyes. Her pupils were blown wide and round from lust. No lethally, carnivorously slit pupils that could pierce him through like a fish hook.

He wasn’t hooked; she was. He could roll with that. He knew she was a good lay. OK, better than good, great.

He took her chin, which again was far easier when you’re taller than the target of your lust. While feminine, it wasn’t pointed or severe enough for him to get the grip he really wanted.

It was fine. He could get past it. The devil was in the details but he had danced with him before and always ended up on top.

"You gonna keep this outside or are you going to finally let me put the key in?" Her voice came out all syrup and sweet. The last time he had heard it, it intrigued and well, turned him on.

He willed the cognac in his system to get him going.

Maybe it was the cognac, and maybe it was something else… but…

His little Iron Man just wasn’t feeling it fully.

'You've got to be kidding me. We had a fantastic time the last time she did that spread on us. Get it together.' He thought about what they did before, and the prospects of a repeat performance. It was stimulating.

Hot.

Fun.

Easy breezy.

Slam dunk.

She brought him back for another kiss and her manicured nails dragged down his back.

If she were Sesshomaru he’d be a filet-o-Stark by now. This why this was the smart play. She was everything right. She fit what he was, she and dozens of pretty women to come.

She was everything he had wanted before, and hell even more. He had bagged supermodels and other women who probably were more attractive but at least she somewhat interesting. One of those models he took back to the jet from one Gala couldn’t carry a conversation if you gave her a bucket.

He could handle this; he needed this. It made sense. It was the logical, common-sense play. And if Tony knew anything; he was smart, damnit.

"I just love it when someone takes charge and puts it in." That wasn't a lie. He did. He totally did.

But he knew that she didn’t have what it took to really put him in his place.

He’d always have the reins. Just like always, a bit disappointing. No, this was safe. This was the shallow end of the pool, where he could see the bottom.

Not starting down at a dizzying, depthless cliff, or into the Andromeda galaxy.

No fangs, no prissiness, no scrying, no sitting up in bed (she slept on her stomach, most others did
too), no feeling ass-sore despite youki. No stupid long silver hair getting everywhere. Everywhere!
No stripes and weird vague answers to questions that were pretty damn straight forward. No
question games! No more of his nice forks getting turned into ninja weapons. No more of that fur
thing getting all over him. No going off to sulk on the damn Chrysler building when his own tower
had a perfectly fine (taller and thicker too, no euphemism) antenna. No creepy interspecies
relations to speak of. No more hair washing or showering together or anything that blurred the
lines he had firmly laser-cut into the sand.

Suddenly, his wrist was grabbed. He must have zoned out, damn maybe he was a bit drunk.

Instead of slashes of crimson that matched his Mark XLVI suit, there was a Cartier diamond tennis
bracelet dangling from it.

His mind flashed to the time he had grabbed Sesshomaru's wrist at the sink when he brought back
the crabs. Still so weird. He was so weird. Then later when he grabbed his own on the roof of his
tower when he went off on him for going after the spaceship solo. Clueless, and reckless, classic
combo there. Then his mind jumped to everything before then. When Loki had burned his wrists
when they fought in the basement near substorage room 3-B.

He swore if Loki ever did anything like that again... He shoved the thought out of his mind. He
didn't want to think about Loki. At all.

His mind plunged back into Sesshomaru's fiery gold eyes, glazed in blue youki. When he when he
pinned him to the Quinjet floor by his wrists, golden eyes and silver hair all blue in the youki of
the floor. His smile.

His little iron man perked up a bit.

His grip always smooth and hard, like porcelain coated vibranium. Only it had some give to it, and
of course the talons that he could lengthen and shorten on command. And his wrists, just like the
rest of his body, were thin and almost delicate to look at, but one touch and you could feel the
power humming in his steel cable wire-taut muscles.

Just like a suspension bridge, stronger than they look. Ok that was a weird analogy; he had
officially drank too much.

He doubted all Demons had that caliber of body awareness. Hell, not just his own body awareness,
but Tony's own. Sesshomaru could make him writhe, make him crawl, make Tony fuck him into his
own lab chair.

He remembered that smile, and that desperate oval his mouth made where you could only see the
tips of his fangs.

His mind went to Clint seeing the same thing. No.

Tony looked up to Christine, tempting, glowing, and an automatic win. They were playing same the
game that at first wanted to play with Sesshomaru.

But.

Tony Stark never half assed anything. He wanted it all.

This was no game anymore. He was playing for keeps. Extra Innings.

There was no way he was letting Clint 'I once challenged Thor to a rib eating contest and got sick
at a TGI Fridays’ Barton was going to outdo him in his own tower.

He was jamming the elevator down button so fast he: one, didn't know how he had gotten to the elevator so fast: two, didn't know how he suddenly had this impulse of clarity.

This was stupid. This was really, really backwards.

The cognac swirled in his brain, and fogged his other senses, but never failed to give him clarity on personal matters.

"Whoa Tony, where's the fire? Is there an emergency at Stark Tower? New York? Something from SHIELD? Chitauri?" Her voice buzzed unwelcoming in his ear and he made a face and turned to her.

"No, don't start your tweets to Teen Vogue yet. I'm just not in the mood." Tony wished the elevator would come faster, but his life was no perfect little movie.

"OK I am not buying that for a... oh wait. Has the big time Bachelor Tony Stark finally gotten leashed by Pepper Potts? You two back together?" Her pretty face lit up with 'juicy story' written across her forehead and all Tony could do was bark out a chuckle.

But he had been leashed last night... Sesshomaru had tied up his wrists with a whip he had no hopes of replicating.

He wanted to tie him up, vice versa. and every grey area in between.

"Hah, um no. Pepper Potts is the CEO of Stark Enterprises only, and way too out of my league. Leave her out of anything. I mean anything. Unless of course you want your career to be tits up and blogging on Buzzfeed about 'what junk food is your soulmate?'...and why isn't this elevator faster? I put the Gala in the one hotel with elevators slower than a nursing homes' wifi." Tony's blood pressure began to spike by this point.

"Tony. You can tell me if things are getting bad. Off the record. We got aliens, a downed spaceship, two Norse gods, only one trustworthy, and a Demon from hell all in your tower. Then someone shoots up your Tower and you lose your mind. What's really going on?" Tony's gut soured. He wasn't from hell. But. when she put it that way it sounded like he was an unhinged mess.

Except everything seemed to click in this moment. It clicked even though it shouldn't.

Even though this really, really wasn't the smart play.

"Off the record," He paused for effect. "I'm done playing games." Tony, again, thanked any being in the cosmos that the elevator dinged just that moment. He strode in, well probably more like swayed in but who cared?

The look on Christine's face was almost appeased.

"All work and no play makes Tony Stark a dull boy. I don't buy it." Christine scrutinized him the same way some of his MIT professors did when they were trying to assess if he was really smarter than them.

He was. Still is.

"The customer isn't always right." Tony responded as the elevator doors closed. He needed more alcohol for the Jet trip back to the tower. A lot more.
Tony Stark just decided to commit to something other than good scotch, stylish wardrobes, and thinking of good nicknames.

But that didn't work out too well.

Yet, Tony wasn't going to lie, he had thought Loki was going to give him a piece of his mind.

But he didn't, to Tony's incredulous shock. Not only did Loki side with him and think Sesshomaru overreacted but he also thought they'd be terrible together. Loki practically thanked him for attempting to hook up with a reporter.

Normally Tony liked people being on his side and thinking he was right, but he had been thirsting for a fight. He wanted Loki to go full 'Sesshoki' on him, saying what a jackass he was. He wanted Loki to go full diva, hating him for pissing off his bestie. He wanted the fight so he could work off the anger still thrashing in him.

'I wanted Loki to try to lay into me so I could fire back that I was completely justified. Instead my anger just compounded. Who was Loki to say that we are bad for each other? Who was Loki to say that it was better for me to hurt Sesshomaru now rather than later?! Like I'd hurt him if we stayed together, I'd treat him so well. How dare Loki warn Sesshomaru off me?! Reindeer Games is so arrogant he even claimed to see this coming!' Tony simmered in his anger, not knowing what to do with any of it.

What right did Loki have?

Tony wanted to throw it back in Loki's face that all they had was just sex; it didn't mean anything. Loki couldn't prove otherwise.

But Tony knew it meant more even before the Gala. It had gotten to be way more than just sex. Tony saw Sesshomaru's smile. He washed his hair. He told Sesshomaru about his parents. He told him he thought he was the fastest thing he knew.

Tony wouldn't admit it till he saw the pancakes, but maybe one of the reasons he wanted to fool around at the Gala was to 'one-up' Sesshomaru. How dare anyone make Tony Stark feel like he was ever on the bottom to 'one-up' anyone in the first place? Because how dare Sesshomaru let anyone else see him as vulnerable as he saw him when he thought what they had was special.

He was special now by proxy: he was the only one to see during another of his night terrors.

Now that Tony thought about it; Sesshomaru might have been the first person to stay the night in his Stark Tower bedroom since the Battle of New York. Usually he took his 'pounce and bounces' to a hotel, or made them leave soon after sex to prevent them from seeing what Sesshomaru saw.

The PTSD panic attack. He had blamed it on Sesshomaru, which wasn't fair. Hell, once he even got a PTSD panic attack from simply seeing a NASA photograph of the Horsehead Nebula. The sniper shooting, and seeing Sesshomaru hit the stage was too much.

Tony reassured himself it would be too much for most people.

It was what he wanted to clear up with him that very morning. That the weird, awkward, tightlipped uptight Demon Lord had done better than paid therapists' advice at helping him get through one.
He just had to ask to watch the two conversations Sesshomaru had with Loki. He had to be that paranoid to know what Sesshomaru thought of the Operation. And obviously what he thought of him!

He wasn't about to touch the validity of the 'you're obsessed' statement Bruce said.

'Sesshomaru said he still wanted to go back to his time. He hinted at liking Clint, who always seemed to have Sesshomaru's back. Clint had appreciated the crabs when I called him weird for getting them. He had defended Sesshomaru when everyone and I ripped on him in the bar about how stupid his and Steve's Hufflepuff team was. Clint defended him when I made him feel stupid.' Tony's suspicions snowballed in his frazzled state of mind.

Then that next morning he saw him in the kitchen looking like a human wearing Clint's clothes and something inside him just snapped.

Sesshomaru looked like himself but at the same time completely different. Loki had taken everything he savored about him and rounded it. His taunting edges, his sharp points, his gold eyes, his long silver hair, his moon and stripes. Those ears. He saw the way he interacted with Clint and he didn't have time or the energy for it. Did Loki change him into a human to appease some weird desire of Clint's? Did his anomaly want to change everything he found unique about him for Clint? Everything seemed like some inside joke he stood on the outside of. In his own tower even!

'The man who claims he has never left me and blips youki into my mouth during rough sex so I can actually sit down without easing down afterwards, is wearing another man's clothes. The Demon whose youki shimmers for me, who smiles for me, is changing himself for someone else. I don't want him to change a goddamn thing, not a single hair, not for me, especially not for anyone else. He is my anomaly and I mean that.' Tony recalled thinking exactly that as he took his cufflink from the counter.

That made Tony storm out, and that's when he knew that Sesshomaru had to be sleeping with Clint.

Tony had built this castle of evidence that Sesshomaru and Clint had a thing going all along. Only it fell like a house of Cards.

He had gone looking for anything to prove his hypothesis that Sesshomaru and Clint were friends with benefits that he cherry picked and highlighted weak data and wrangled it to a shoddy conclusion.

The conclusion that he had to act first before Sesshomaru really hurt him. A Preemptive strike, Tony knew weapons after all.

But he was wrong. Talk about confirmation bias.

Because Loki, of all people, was the one sleeping with Clint, not Sesshomaru.

Jeez, he thought he up to risky business, but Clint definitely took the title there.

'Sesshomaru does, did, like me for more than just a fun time. And apparently he wanted me to go meet his mom's spirit, not Clint. And apparently he is only nineteen in Demon years. That explains almost everything about his behavior that puzzles me: his obsession with proving himself, his relationship with Loki, the grunge, his broodiness, his pride.' Tony debated pushing his plate onto the floor like a cat and decided not to, the 'Corey Crawford #50' Roomba would just make a mess of it.
Bambi was the family Sesshomaru never had and Sailor Moon was the little brother Loki could depend on. He hated when Nat was right.

Especially when stakes were high.

Instead of Bruce, Natasha, Loki, and Jaken calling him out for being overly dramatic, everyone was on his side and that was somehow worse. It made him feel angry and stupid for wanting more than a fling in the first place.

The only one who thought they could work it out couldn't work a microwave and had the most unrealistic relationship expectations of all time. Thanks Thunder muscles.

'Good Luck working it out with a Doctor who has a much intellect as Bruce and I do while watching your little brother with Mom and Dad.' Tony grinned at that.

Except, it was the right call to keep it a fling because Sesshomaru lashed out at him at the first whiff of infidelity. Sesshomaru had been pissed.

Sesshomaru was hurt.

Which meant one thing, what Sesshomaru said in the shower: "...It is not in my nature to linger in one place for long...But this Sesshomaru is no slave to his nature." meant he was thinking of staying. He wanted him in return. And yet they just ended up hurting each other. Loki was right: they were terrible for each other.

Except it made his blood boil to think that.

He had heard what Loki said to him when he teleported him into his room. That he was dull and wasteful. Loki must at some point had thought maybe, just maybe, the two of them had a shot. But maybe when Loki thought about it more; he had changed his mind.

Loki now thought that Tony had done the right thing after all.

'So why do I feel like getting wasted all over again, to forget it all happened? Why do I keep remembering the glacial flatness in Sesshomaru's eyes and how flat his ears were against his head? It's almost like the cold, wintery tingle that needled through his bones still stuck with him. When Sesshomaru grappled him, it was almost as if the reassuring youki in his arc reactor spun to a halt as well. Why do I want to just see him again and try to talk things over, not just see him again to get frisky?' Tony pushed his cold pancakes around.

Tony had never been one to identify emotions effectively, or really handle them at all. He squashed them, ignored them, drowned them, etcetera blah blah blah... but he knew this one. He saw the emotion that Sesshomaru put out like he tattooed it over his moon.

Betrayal.

It frightened Tony, and seriously caught him off guard and unprepared. He never thought he would elicit that strong of a feeling in anyone, much less want to.

It was the one thing he wanted to save everyone from, 'hit it and quit its' didn't cause this much frustration and agony and horseshit he never wanted to step in. He knew first-hand what betrayal was like, and spent his life since Obedaiah avoiding it...til now.

Tony couldn't remember the last time he cared so much over how someone felt about him.
Tony, upon seeing Sesshomaru successfully pilot the Quinjet, felt his chest bloom with pride and his gut sour with tremendous envy. He wanted to be the one to be next to him, not Clint. He wanted to go to the Salt Flats, he wanted all of it.

Even after he had been strangled. Again. Was he some sort of abuse victim?

But no, let's think rationally. He really shouldn't be jealous of Clint, but he was. This was important to Sesshomaru and Clint was going with him because he made that stupid rule.

He needed a distraction. And a drink.

Bad company was still better than no company, and he didn't really trust himself to be alone. Drinking alone at...damn it was early. Drinking alone at 8:44 am in most circles meant alcoholism.

Drinking with a buddy over blueberry pancakes in most social circles meant brunch.

"Well, it's just you and me Toady." Tony got up to make himself a screwdriver.

"Hmph, For the last time my name is Jaken, and I am a Water Demon." Jaken stole one of Pepper's uneaten pancakes. Chivalry was indeed dead! He could have saved those for her.

"You're 'Toady', 'Lucky Charms' or 'Frogger' until you've proven yourself not completely useless." Tony decided to be giving and pushed the rest of his pancakes to Jaken. He immediately started to house them.

Maybe if Jaken could beat Thor in Mario Kart, he could beat him in a pancake eating contest.

"Useless?! Ill have you know being Lord Sesshomaru's retainer is far from a useless position. Your human affairs mean little to me, except they will most certainly bring ruin to my Lord and myself." Jaken, aka trash compactor, gobbled down the rest of his leftover pancakes. He slid slyly over to the other Demon.

Time to pump him for information.

"Yeah, yeah, you keep repeating that. You know, you're more 'gloom and doom' than Pepper when it comes to Board meetings. If you're going to be this much of a cynic, and if Sesshomaru is hell bent on staying to blast Thanos into goo, then why not help me kill two chitauri with one stone? Help me help your Lord survive the apocalypse and prove you're worthy of wearing my old AC/DC T-shirts." Tony took a deep sip of his screw driver.

Toady's yellow eyes bugged out of his head. He never stood a chance.

"Aha! So you admit you need my expertise! Not that anything you could come up with could help my Lord that much. You claim to be a genius blacksmith, but all I've seen you do is fly about and mouth off! Even that half Demon brother of my Lord, Inuyasha, and his insufferable friends could fare better than you in real battle. You are all talk!" Toady accused and Tony had to stop himself from saying that was rich.

Oh wait, no he didn't.

"That's rich coming from someone who literally can't shut up about how great 'his Lord' is and how everyone is a tire fire by comparison. You know he doesn't need a cheerleader right? He needs someone who can actually have his back and not hide in the fountain in Central Park." Tony loved egging this little idiot on. He stood up to leave the kitchen knowing Toady was baited.
"And that's what I call the Serpent Demon calling the Snake Demon long!" Toady squawked. Um what?

"You're in the year 2015, use our idioms: pot calling kettle black." Tony interjected, leading Toady to his lab. He didn't know how Sesshomaru did it, having this guy follow him around all the time. He thought Happy was terrible about small talk...yeesh.

"I refuse! And you cannot claim you don't say the same about my Lord! Of all the humans you spout the most of his abilities, and tinker with his youki in your suit! Don't think I cannot sense it. It is clear as a full moon that you are heavily infatuated with my Lord. I can see through your little charade! You still stand by my Lord even after he spurred you physically..." Jaken trailed off as he connected the dots.

Jaken: follows Sailor Moon around even though he gets knocked around. Tony: wants to get into Sailor Moon's pants even though this was the second time he had him by the throat.

Tony patiently waited for reality to set in, sipping his screwdriver.

"I am a loyal servant to my Lord. You are infatuated with him. He hits me, he hurt you...NO! I refuse to believe we have any common ground! This is absurd! I cannot accept this!" Tony smirked as Jaken visibly paled to a sickly pale shade of green that should be reserved for Mylanta bottles.

"Look 'potential high-school dissection experiment', I don't care what you can accept." Tony paused spotting his emergency bottle of Glenfidditch tucked behind some Erlenmeyer flasks. He also spotted a old water glass that Bruce had been drinking out of. He doubted Toady would mind.

"What I do care about is saving this planet and keeping Sailor Moon from getting in over his head. Whether Sesshomaru wants to admit it to anyone or not, he needs our help. People who have his best interests in mind and who can fight in this war. He's powerful, he's fast, and he knows it, but he can't do it alone, and I won't let him." Tony pounded back a hearty gulp of his screwdriver for effect. This invasion was on him, not a man who got kidnapped by his best friend to fix his mess.

Toady cocked his head to the side and sighed.

"Yes, yes, I know all of this you dull, dense human. I have stood by my Lord for half a century. I have witnessed his triumphs and his struggles. You ignorant blacksmith have only seen a sliver of his fortitude in battle. But, perhaps, too a sliver of his recklessness! He got me wet from that fountain in the park during his battle!" Toady spun around in what used to be Bruce's stool. He went from one big green sidekick to a little green sidekick.

"Ok, seriously, what's with the Blacksmith title?" Tony's curiosity got the better of him.

"You forge weapons, correct?" Jaken fired back and Tony pulled a face and scratched his goatee.

"That's not what I'm about anymore. I have been blown up by my own weapons. My ex-best friend tried to kill me with my own designs. Hell even Iva—" Tony was cut off by Jaken scoffing. Scoffing!

"What blacksmith stops producing weapons because they could destroy themselves?! That only encouraged Totosai! Doesn't that mean they were worthy of your creation if they very nearly ended your life? My Lord asked a blacksmith to create a sword from a Demon that once tried to kill him because it was worthy of him! The title, Blacksmith, is an honorable one. Do you believe, foolish human, that once this threat is disposed of that there won't be more threats? There will always be a need of blacksmiths, as long as the natural order of things continues." Jaken monologued and Tony
leaned back in disbelief that Toady could…well actually articulate something.

He had never really thought about it that way.

"Natural Order? You mean entropy, everything eventually dissolves into chaos and disorder. One of the many things I don't need is a biology lecture." Tony was trying to follow Toady here and couldn't figure out if he should feel insulted that he couldn't predict his line of thinking, or reassured he was losing it.

"You humans are too blind and naïve to your own history. To obtain greatness! That Titan that comes here, those two infernal Gods, and Demons understand this. Ugh humans, too many of them, maybe my Lord should let the titan wipe some of them out! This is my Lord's burden to bare, and it is my duty has his retainer to make it easier for him to do so." Tony rolled his eyes, of course he had to get Jaken on his high horse again about some philosophical bullshit.

He pushed off the floor with his wheeled chair to grab a few tools, some leftover youki capsules he had, some full, some empties, and the scotch. He actively avoided the toxins: Sirius, Cerberus, and Blitzen gathering dust in a locked down section of his lab along with the ammunition. He didn't care about any pep talk from Toady, those weren't seeing the light of day again.

"Ok, you want to make things easier for him? Then put your money where your mouth is and help me with this containment field I'm tinkering with." Tony goaded and tossed him an empty youki capsule. Jaken bobbled it five times before catching the damn thing. Some help.

"A containment field? Why would that help my Lord?" Jaken asked, turning the capsule over in his little clawed hands.

"Well, one way to make sure what you want doesn't escape, is to trap them. Youki and magic act as complete opposites. I'm not getting into the science with you. But if these guys are mostly magic, then a youki containment field should be able to trap them, or at least minimize the magic they can use in it. But I'm have a hard time sustaining it." Tony educated, throwing up a few holos to impress Frogger. He wasn't impressed and instead kept fiddling with the capsule.

"Perhaps you aren't as dim as Inuyasha's friends after all. My Lord and almost every other Demon sustains their youki in waves. You need to make his youki act in waves." Jaken finally put the capsule down and motioned his hand in waves.

"Waves huh. Makes sense, I should have thought of that. Show me the goods then Frogger." Tony saddled up next to his temporary Demon lab sidekick and began to sketch tidal patterns out, scotch forgotten.

"Jarvis, I don't want any interruptions. I don't care if the tower is burning down or Loki gets turned into a purple stag again, got it?" Tony commanded Jarvis, he needed some space, and he needed to distract himself until Sailor Moon got back to the tower and he could figure everything out.

"Yes sir." Tony sighed. Good maybe now he could get some actual work done.

After an hour or so, Tony began to miss having someone who actually could speak to him on an intellectual level. Tony, while keeping his promise to himself of banning the 'Jolly Green Traitor' from had lab, did miss having him by his side. It could have been worse, as much as he and Cap could talk about some things, he'd argue he'd be worse in the lab than Jaken.

So, he would take what he could get for now.

"Well, we made some minimal progress. What do you know, miracles can happen." Tony bit
sarcastically and leaned back, rubbing his goatee. Jaken stretched out and hit one of the holos, bringing up D.E.M.O.N.S.

"That, is what I perfected the other day, I know your youki must have reacted to it: Distant Extraterrestrial Military Orbital Neural Signal. Aka D.E.M.O.N.S. Don't thank me now, wait for the main attraction which I had to cobble together at my Gala thanks to SHIELD failing to exterminate the rats in their H.Q." Tony gestured with a flourish, the diagnostic test of D.E.M.O.N.S via his miniature anti-ballistic missile interceptor launch point at the base of his tower.

Jaken cackled. Tony kicked the stool out from under him and watched him fall.

"Lousy human! If only I had my staff!" Toady dusted himself off for show. His lab was basically a clean room. "I felt your proximity barrier, if that is what you call perfection you have come up short!" Tony heard the insult, but was more watching Jaken's body posture. He seemed a lot more interested in it than he led on. Boom Natasha, see reading people like a textbook.

"You cannot be serious about me coming up short. They had mirrors in your time, or a yardstick, or in your case maybe a ruler, right?" Tony picked up the pencil Toady had been writing with and held it high above his head. To his disappointment Jaken didn't flail and jump after it. Poor sportsmanship.

"I'll have you know that I was considered quite tall for my tribe! I even ruled over them before I met Lord Sesshomaru and became his retainer!" Jaken protested.

Now this was interesting. This little guy led a tadpole village and he gave it up? Maybe he got tired of being a big frog in a small tidal pool? Tony reached for the scotch and poured it into the glass that was Bruce's. Now it was fair game.

"Someone like you just giving up power to follow someone around? Sounds more like your little tadpole scout den got tired of your inflated ego. Bad campaign? Coup d'etat? Voter Fraud?" Tony had long ago finished his screwdriver and poured the Glenfidditch into his own glass. The remnants of OJ would just help its flavor. Possibly.

Jaken stilled.

"They were almost entirely wiped out by a stronger Demon. We tried to fight, but it was no use. Then suddenly Lord Sesshomaru appeared and saved us! I owed him a life debt, a very serious matter in Demon culture. I vowed to serve him until my services were no longer necessary." Jaken eyed the glass of scotch suspiciously. Tony pushed it closer to him.

"Why did he save you?" Tony took a slow sip of his scotch. The OJ definitely didn't help. Clean glass next time. He fiddled with a gravity equation while Toady grasped the glass of medicore scotch lightly.

"I don't know. I never asked him. My Lord can be quite mysterious and secretive with his motives! He helped Inuyasha and his friends multiple times for no real gain and tolerates his horrible mother who never bothered to even remember by name." Jaken swirled the liquid and brought it up to the light as if inspecting it.

"Another reason I'm glad I was an only child….It's scotch! Just drink it Froggy Walker Green. It's not green label though, as if I'd waste the good stuff on you and I've had enough of green." Tony finally pushed the glass over to him and Toady took, what Tony would consider a pretty champ gulp of the stuff.
"I can handle anything you humans can! Especially you, irritating Blacksmith." Jaken took another swing and Tony quirked his eyebrow at the title again, but he would let it slide. Weirdly, he got where Toady was getting from. A bit. Maybe that was the Grey Goose talking.

"Handle things? Toady you literally have to handle that glass with both hands. You know that right? Me: one, Toady zero. Anyway. Back on track. With D.E.M.O.N.S. we can extend Moonie's senses past the stratosphere to orbit Earth. We can get the jump on them before they can show up to crash the party since I bet they have ways to get around NASA's detection. No more uninvited guests, I have enough of those in my tower anyway. Damn squatters." Tony sipped more of his scotch, the bitter OJ taste long gone. Jarvis cycled through the projections of the satellite simulations through six different permutations of coordinated missile launch points to cover most of the globe, save the north pole.

Sorry Santa, you'll have to get Rudolph to guide more than your sleigh.

Tony rubbed his hand down his face as Jaken literally climbed on the worktable. Usually only drunk college kids did this. Who knew where his feet had been. Dum-e would have to decontaminate everything.

It was then he spotted a long silver hair. He let it lay there.

"My Lord and that troublesome Magic God have already spoken about where the next vessels will land, but this isn't a total waste of your efforts. Not that all of this isn't futile anyway, all this spells doom." Jaken nearly flopped off the table from staring straight up and poking the hologram.

"Ever a 'ray of sunshine' aren't you? Weren't you just harping about how Sesshomaru is the strongest Demon you had ever come across?" Tony decided he'd have a word with Loki about discussing battle tactics with Earth's biggest loud mouth. "He went through the trouble of saving you and now you just doubt him and are the biggest Debbie Downer other than Bruce. Ugh, I just said the word Debbie downer, I might be turning into Cap." Tony grimaced, disgusted with himself but also over Toady's 'tude.

"My Lord scyed his own demise, and others. Scrys aren't guesses; they are visions of the future! I suspect it is why he went to go see Inukimi, his underhanded mother." Jaken narrowed his eyes, in what Tony supposed was supposed to be intimidating. On the table, he was about his height while sitting down.

He wondered how he'd react if he told him he had bent his precious Lord over it and fucked him senseless the other night.

He'd like to do that again, have it done to him.

No. No. No. Tony. Bad ideas. He swore he thought this before at some point.

"So that's why he went to go visit Mommy Dearest. You don't seem to like her much, Reindeer Games at one point said not even he had met her, that Sesshomaru said she was barely around, living in the sky or something." Tony hoped that the liquor was beginning to work in Jaken's little limbs since his usually big eyes had gotten pretty squinty.

"Yes, all true, and I shutter to imagine what would occur if that Magic God and Inukimi would meet. Nothing good would happen, that would be certain. Inukimi is a fearsome and self-serving Demoness. I have only met her once when my Lord sought her out to finish completing the Meidou Zangetsu ha." Jaken, officially completely useless at this point, had flopped onto the table, back up looking at the hologram like a teen girl would stargazing on a first date.
"The Zamboni what?" Tony prodded and he too began to feel the scotch take hold. It was then he looked around his lab to make sure he didn't somehow summon one of the hockey Roombas.

"A powerful technique discovered by Lord Sesshomaru that could send Demons straight to the Demonic Underworld. He no longer has the ability; he selflessly gave it to his unworthy brother. He sought out his mother because she was the only other Demon who could open portals to the Demonic underworld using the Meido stone." Jaken sat up abruptly. "However, I suspect, as does my Lord, that this enemy has the power to do so as well. That or they have the Meido Stone. It is the only way Ryukotsusei could have been in that vessel Lord Sesshomaru shot down." Jaken had begun to sway and Tony patted himself on the back. All it took for Toady to fully open up was a little mid-shelf scotch.

"Yeah. Bambi lost what little control he has when he learned that Ghost Demons were a part of Thanos' party bus. We will find a way to beat them; it's nothing we can't handle. In fact, it's why I first made Blitzen." Tony thumbed the display case and Jaken paled again to that sick shade of a Mylanta bottle.

"Per usual, you humans miss the point. Whoever has the Meido Stone can send my Lord, or any human he wishes to the Demon Underworld. There is no surviving it. Inukimi sent Rin there where she perished just to teach my Lord a lesson." Tony choked on his scotch, it came out in spurts.

"Ack—um what?!" Tony still sputtered.

"She returned Rin's soul back to her only once she proved her point. Humans are fragile creatures and when Lord Sesshomaru placed Rin in my care of all things I had to learn to become even stronger. Lord Sesshomaru helped train me just like your mild-mannered Berserker." Jaken rambled and Tony made a serious, serious note of discussing his psychopathic mother with Sesshomaru when he got back. She had the power to send people to hell. Literal hell. And the goddamn chitauri somehow probably have it, or something like it.

God, he thought his parents had issues.

"Why if Lord Sesshomaru didn't show up when he did, I could have beat that bandit!" Tony ignored Jaken's blubbering.

"You know, you're not so bad Frogger. You basically just admitted to getting stronger, 'achieving greatness' as you call it, to protect Rin. Under that scaly green skin you're just a little softie after all." Tony flashed a grin that was all teeth. Jaken scrambled and promptly fell off the table.

Didn't spill the scotch though. No party foul. Style points.

"It is my duty to do as my Lord wishes to the best of my abilities." Frogger climbed back onto his chair and reached again for the scotch. Tony refreshed his glass for him.

"Just admit it, Lil Miss Sunshine has warmed your cold blooded frogger heart." Tony was definitely going to keep this up.

"Has not!" Toady protested.

"Mmmmm has too." Tony persisted, childish. "It's not a bad thing, embrace the whole Nanny thing." Tony tried his first experiment on the wave design for the Youki, it sloshed to life in the containment cube he had set up for it, but to his dismay looked highly unstable.
"I am no nanny. I—fool! That's not what I meant by a wave! This is what I mean by a wave!" Jaken grabbed his scotch glass and Tony hoped he wouldn't dump it everywhere. Jaken instead put his whole hand over the glass. Was he about to get 'Criss Angel mind freaked' or whatever it was called?

Yet the scotch inside the glass began to wave…inward? How was that possible? That defied everything about the laws of nature and physics. Right where the waves would collide into each other they instead spun like a whirlpool upwards into a dome.

Unreal.

"Jarvis, you're rendering this into an algorithm right? I need you to run the parameters on this and map me a usable model. I think Toady here just broke fluid dynamics." Tony marveled for a minute before tapping the screen and recording the phenomenon.

"I have broken nothing. Behold the power of Water Demons!" Tony could tell that Jaken was maybe concentrating too hard for as drunk as he probably was.

Well, he too was a little drunk. He did just forget to carry that one.

"Don't get ahead of yourself, Aquaman. Sounds like my original hunch was right, you might be a big help after all." Tony smiled, if this didn't knock the pants of Sailor Moon he didn't know what would.

Of course, it was important for the invasion and everything, but impressing him and maybe catching that smile…or ass.

Wait. No. Stop just stop Tony.

"What are these?!" Tony hadn't even noticed that Jaken had stopped the wavy whirlpool thing and had picked up one of Sesshomaru's spare 'hear ain'ts'.

"You've never seen those? I made them for Sesshomaru weeks ago. His eardrums burst when Point Break blew up my microwave trying to make…well something, and I made them for him to dampen noises." Tony slurred a little bit, mouth drying a bit about the memory of him standing shirtless and soaked in the doorway of the bathroom.

Those abs. Those stripes arcing over his hips and the ones that raced up his ribs. He wanted to run his fingers along them at least one more time.

Jaken remained silent. It weirded Tony out. Little Green was almost as chatty as he was.

"…You know, Dog Demon ears, they're more sensitive." Tony rambled.

"… you just gave them to him?" Jaken's head tilted to the side.

"Uh yeah. I mean he wanted to give me something in return but that wasn't my angle." Tony replied honestly, kinda confused where Frogger was taking his cross examination.

Jaken just remained silent for another minute and put down the hear ain'ts.

"Together we will be much better at helping Lord Sesshomaru than that Magic God. I still don't fully trust him." Jaken slurred. Tony brought up wave videos on youtube on a lark and found one of surfers riding what appeared to be a hurricane swell.
"Ever hang-ten frogger?" Tony expanded a surfing video "Also, jealousy isn't a good look on you. Just because you were replaced by Horns as Moonie's number one doesn't mean you can't win him back." Tony grinned, then frowned thoughtfully. The horrifying thought that he actually had something else in common with Toady made an unpleasant shiver run up his spine. Winning him back from Clint. Gross. This whole conversation was gross.

Iron Toad.. Tony grimaced. Christ.

"Hardly! No one can take my place by my Lord's side; we are the last of the Demons. That Mischief God spelled me asleep to speak to Rin in private about something. Something private pertaining to Rin and Lord Sesshomaru. It was something he didn't want Rin to tell our Lord, I just know it. I say it was something that happened on the Distant Realm. I also don't trust he has told us everything about this enemy we face either. If Lord Sesshomaru suspects the same he hasn't told me!" Jaken huffed and wobbled. Tony didn't really think he'd get that blasted.

The surfing video began to play some 90's grunge song which Moonie would totally be into.

Jarvis, for reasons unknown, probably a bug, at least it better have been one, brought up the lyrics. Savage Garden: I want you.

'Ooh I want you, I don't know if I need you but Ooh I'd die to find out.'

Maybe that was why Frogger was such a Debbie Downer. Their most experienced player was going to end up being their biggest liability.

What a fucking train wreck.

"Indeed! My Lord has been prudent in keeping some of his abilities from all of you!" Jaken was so close to spilling all his beans Tony could taste it.

"Secrets?! Between us friends? I'm hurt Toady." Tony, on the edge of his chair began to run through the possibilities.

Telepathy.
Laser vision.

Controls weather.

OK so maybe he just thought of three X-men.

'Getting comfy, getting perfect is what I live for
But a look and then a smell of perfume
It's like I'm down on the floor
And I don't know what I'm in for.'

"Humph, I may speak my mind but I will not reveal my Lord's secrets even if I don't know why he keeps them. Maybe you should ask him yourself." Was Jaken seriously smirking at him? What sort of inside joke was he not a part of?

"Did you stroke out over there? Do you forget he tried to kill me the last time he looked at me? Strangle play is only OK if it's in the bedroom and there is a safety word in play. My safety word is always 'Language'. There is always some cursing involved." Tony knew he was rambling and maybe the innuendo was over his head, but it was more for his own benefit than Jaken's.

Despite the missed humor, Tony tapped his youki swirling arc reactor which ran a bit cold for his tastes.

He had pretty much forgotten what it felt like to not have youki in his arc reactor by this point, but the chilly feeling he could really do without.

"Yeah I don't think we're what you call on 'healthy terms'. I think those nut jobs who write prisoners have a better shot of a solid relationship than we do." Tony murmured lowly, as if that truth muted something deep inside him. Wait, did he just say relationship?

He couldn't let Loki be right. Could he? Nah, maybe he should just give Horns this win. Give up. Throw in the towel. It had been a good run. The next time he ran into Christine Everhart he'd be game. It had just been too soon and he had too much scotch.

Right. Yeah.

Jaken cackling grated Tony's skin like a belt sander. He was laughing at him?! Fuck he KNEW he should have never let him in here.

"My Lord, kill YOU?! If my Lord wished you dead, you would be frail human. My Lord has maimed stronger for lesser offenses than you and what you've done. My Lord, whether he knew what he was doing or not, was bonding to you for an intended mate. Lord Sesshomaru has chosen you to meld his youki with, that is not to be taken lightly and he would have not killed you unless for a stronger slight. Also, Blacksmith, if what you claim is true, that dense Storm God is right, my Lord would most likely hear you out. He is not without reason, and his markings are still red."

Jaken took another damn greedy gulp of his scotch and Tony had never been more confused.

'Conversation has a time and place in the interaction
Of a lover and a mate but the time of talking
Using symbols, using words can be likened
To a deep sea diver who is swimming with a raincoat.'

"...Ok. Come at me straight Toady, because in the kitchen it sounded like you wanted your precious Lord nothing near my 'repulsive human ass'. Which, by the way is not repulsive. I was rated top eligible bachelor for like seven years running." Tony wasn't sure why he brought up the
last point. But he did anyway. He also didn't know why it mattered to him in the least that Frogger, of all life forms, approved of his relationship with Sesshomaru or not. Wait. Did he just think 'relationship' again? Ugh.....

His gut churned and Jaken picked up the hear aints again.

"You, even though are a mere repugnant, arrogant human, recognize my Lord for who he is. You expelled us from your fortress, but redeemed yourself by retrieving him. You are the only one here perhaps intelligent enough and loyal enough to assist Lord Sesshomaru in his goal of defeating this Titan. Also, I cannot remember anyone ever giving my Lord something and not expecting anything in return aside from Rin and I." Jaken announced, fiddling with the hear aints and Tony swore he almost looked nervous admitting something like that.

"And, ha! If that Mischief God dislikes you and Lord Sesshomaru together then all the more reason for me!" Jaken continued. Tony was at this point 100 percent sure that Jaken was tanked because the last part was slurried more than he probably sounded like coming back from the Gala.

'Anytime I need to see your face I just close my eyes
And I am taken to a place
Where your crystal minds and magenta feelings
Take up shelter in the base of my spine.'

Tony absolutely refused to acknowledge any vindication in what Jaken said. He and Sesshomaru were dysfunctional. They weren't naturally compatible. They hurt each other, the whole hypothesis that they could work would most likely be proven false.

But.

Maybe.

That was just because the experiments they were running were the wrong ones.

He had been running from this the whole time. Deflecting right? Blaming their natural chemistry on, well, just an initial attraction, curiosity. Then blaming the rest on the youki in his reactor. Then running from, well a very real probability.

They should probably actually experiment in, well, both coming to terms that there was something there. Something worth fleshing out. Tony cringed visibly. This wasn't him. Not by a sniper's shot. He had no clue what he was doing. But, he wanted to actually fight for it.

Tony would never admit to being apprehensive.

'I may move so slightly to the arms
And the lips and the face
Of The Human Cannonball that
I need to I want to.'

Fuck it.

He never went half in on anything before in his life. He had faced worse odds. Much worse.

One last shot.

Let's put it all on red and spin the wheel.
Maybe, maybe, there was an outside chance they could be….blegh…good for each other. They just needed to….actually…shudder…communicate.

Why. Why couldn't he have just settled for faceless supermodels? Wait. That totally wasn't even really settling. There were some that were just as attractive as he was, objectively! Ok, well, fuck.

He thought it. He supposed it had to be true. He had it bad.

"You know Toady, I think I may just know exactly why Sesshomaru saved your scaly green skin." Tony managed to croak out, his throat tightly squeezed out the words and he had no idea why. Scotch. Had to be.

"Sir, Steve Rogers and Miss Romanov request entry." Jarvis interrupted and Tony grumbled. He and Jaken were literally on a roll with their orbital progression waves. He was not about to touch on anything else they were talking about.

"Tell em to leave a message, no better yet…speaking of waves and surfing. Jaken, you can strike a pose right? Tell Steve and Natasha to hang ten…like ten minutes." Tony's mouth broke into a wide grin as he moved on to the next one and Jaken mimicked one of the surfers in the video.

"What would you know of Seshsomaru's motivations for saving me, Blacksmith?!" Jaken bit out, going back to before he was rudely interrupted. His whiny voice didn't have it's usual indignant tone so Tony took that as a queue to continue.

"You're like…his weirdo liaison to the outside world. If it wasn't for you, Lucky Charms, he'd probably be some…recluse, maybe a JD Salinger type. Think how awful it would be if he only had Bambi as a friend." He and Toady both shared a guiltless grimace over that.

"They say it's urgent sir, Loki of Asgard and Thor Odinsson are outside they also request Retainer Jaken's presence." Tony huffed, didn't they all just sit around like a sorority and talk in the kitchen? Couldn't he get some damn privacy?! And 'Loki of Asgard', when did his name go and change? And they wanted Jaken? Since when? Of course, once he had started getting buddy-buddy with Lucky Charms everyone else wanted to talk to him too.

He wasn't in the mood for another family intervention.

Tony was sober enough to know how incoherent his thoughts were, which meant he couldn't really that drunk.

"Fine. Let's see what Star Jones and the rest of 'The View' wants." Tony stood, beginning to really feel the scotch now. Jaken hopped into his chair, the same one he fucked Sailor Moon into the other night. Tony's scotch swirled mind caused him to grin mischievously.

'He and Sesshomaru just couldn't be over, they just had to do that again. Next time even filthier.' Tony wrangled his liquor-lusted mind as he opened the workshop door to everyone swarming the door like fans at backstage events he used to do.

"Youuuu raaaaaang?" Tony's words slurred just a hint and he saw Steve give him a classic 'I can't believe this' glare as Jaken failed to walk in a straight line. Whatever, like his feet could reach the pedals in a car anyway.

"We lost radar contact with the Quinjet four minutes ago over Iowa." Natasha wasted no time, her face set like drying concrete.
In fact, everyone's was. Why were they all looking at him? Was there something he wasn't getting?

"Um…" Tony struggled. "OK…." Quinjet, radar, the salt flats. Sesshomaru looking hot piloting it.

Oh. Oh shit. Clint and Sesshomaru. Ohm's law he was a fucking mayhem magnet.

Chapter End Notes

I AM SO SORRY.

I wrote most of this chapter on my phone, and then it got stolen in Cambodia and I was very distraught/creatively destroyed over it.

But! I am back, with a two part chapter. Thank you so much to all my loyal readers. you all really do mean the world to me. I hope that I can continue to improve my writing and keep my characters in character for you

I hope you enjoyed this, please let me know what you think!
"Can you track Sho's youki or not?" Loki's annoying impatient green eyes sharpened. Oh, he was going to be lovely to deal with if…

'Nope. Not gonna think it. That stupidly reckless Demon was probably the most resilient thing alive. I haven't underestimated him before; I'm not going to start now.' Tony pursed his lips. And he wasn't about to do what Loki wanted when he wanted it.

"Jarvis bring up the system diagnostics on the Quinjet right before air traffic control lost radar contact." Tony swayed just a bit turning around a bit too quickly, looking for the Sailor Moon tracker. Tony knew he left it around here somewhere…aha. Tony found it under a printout.

"Sir, The Quinjet was at a cruising altitude of 20,000 feet. Systems report no missile lock from either air to air or surface to air projectiles. No reports of ejection nor doors opening. Though at their altitude they could survive skydive with parachutes if one of the doors were opened. Only report logged was by Clint Barton upon take off stating the aircraft wasn't fueled properly." Tony put the locator out to maximum sensitivity and it didn't ping anything.

He didn't think it would, the distance to Iowa was pushing the limit on its area of effectiveness. It was shorter for Sesshomaru after all.

"You hacked the Quinjet? Good thinking Tony." Natasha nodded in approval, as if he was going to let something stay on his tower without hacking it.

"Thanks Jarvis. No dice on the locator, but remember when Sailor Moon left for Charleston for crabs for our Crabocalypse? He had to keep his youki up for us to track him." Tony thanked his lucky stars he was just this shade of tipsy otherwise he'd be super pissed at everyone in the hallway. They were acting like they were already at someone's funeral. No faith.

"Only thing it could be is a bomb." Natasha reasoned and quickly stormed out of the hallway, maybe to get her phone? Gun? Both?

"My Lord is invincible! No human weapon could kill him! He will return with that odd archer as he promised me." Jaken shouted a little too loudly, waddling to Natasha as if to reassure her. Steve shot Tony a dark look.

"I can't believe you got Jaken drunk. I am disappointed you're not sober either Tony. We should always be on our guard when we're split up...are you even taking this seriously?" Steve's voice sounded low and a bolt of anger flashed through Tony's lungs as he inhaled.

"What?! Jaken isn't a kid, he got himself drunk. And sorry, but how was I supposed to predict this? I'm not the one who can scry the future. And on top of that Stars and Stripes, just because I'm not flying off the handle doesn't mean I am not taking this seriously. Don't treat me like some clueless child when you came to me to figure out what happened to the damn Jet." Tony had enough of all
of this. Steve was really starting to get under his skin.

"We aren't treating you like that Tony. You just don't seem to be processing what the outcomes of this could be." Steve insisted and Tony laughed darkly, so he was expected to panic? It would be the exact opposite of what Sesshomaru and Clint would want him to do. Panicking is what got him into that mess with the snipers.

"You want me to waste my time to put on my suit and fly out to corn-land Iowa? Oh, better yet, why not ask Reindeer Games over there? He can twitch his nose and probably get to the coordinates before I can say 'Bewitched'!" Tony picked up his scotch bottle and took a swig for effect. Loki began to swirl his green magic.

"Don't think about it Glow Stick. Tony is right. This could be a trap to lure you there, and we don't know what information the spies got from Jarvis. SHIELD agents I trust have heard no chatter on any 'anti Mr. Nirvana' attack plans. However, I've had my suspicions. It started with the snipers on the rooftop lighting up Pretty Boy, you, and Bruce up like Christmas, and the hacking of the tower. I think there aren't just a couple of rogue spies, but a sizable faction within SHIELD that has fractured off. I don't know how many people within SHIELD have their own motives, but the lack of fuel in the Jet confirms this. They probably used a bomb to try to take out Pretty Boy, and there is no way Fury would have authroized that." Natasha typed furiously on her phone, Thor put a hand on Loki's shoulder to stop his magic, and Steve paled.

"Only because Fury would rather study him alive, rather than dead. This is why I don't do group projects." Tony audibly groaned, of course it wasn't just one spy. He just had to go and become completely head over heels, or maybe 'helmet over boots' with the one person who attracted more danger than he did.

"Why would our allies do such a thing?!" Point Break blurted out, and Tony was thinking the same thing. He was becoming irritated with all the cloak and dagger crap. He eyed the scotch bottle again, tempted. No. Getting completely slammed wasn't going to help here. He was good. He had this.

"Unconfirmed. I am putting out some usual distress signals, just sent one to Fury. I stated that I believe they are dead and awaiting appropriate response. Glow Stick, how likely do you think it is that Pretty Boy survived?" Natasha put Loki on the spot. He had been unusually silent, then Tony got it. It was probably throwing Steve off that the two people here most likely to lose their shit weren't losing their shit. Steve liked predictability.

"I haven't a clue. We didn't exactly have your Jets back then, nor explosive devices such as these." Loki began to wring his hands and Tony knew he had to get a handle on the situation. Both people that Loki cared about were on the Jet; he had to help get him see reason before he broke down and burned holes in the walls of substorage 3-b again.

"He's fine; they're both fine." Tony stated it like an obvious known fact. Which it was. Everyone gave him a cautious look save Jaken; who had just found Rin. Rin nodded and smiled.

"For….three reasons." Tony continued. He really tried to get his speech to stop slurring because Reindeer Games needed to believe him so he didn't go off and do something more stupid than he usually did. Like turn into a giant lizard or something.

He so didn't need Godzilla in his tower.

"One: he told me he wasn't going to die. Two: I'm so not done with him yet, you win the prize, Thunder Muscles. Three: anyone else remember his youki can literally suppress a space cannon"
blast with the explosive payload of three AIM-9x Sidewinder missiles?" Tony leaned back against his workshop table, imagining the whole room lit up in shimmering blue youki with a gorgeous, silver-haired Demon beneath him, his mouth in a perfect oval, spelling his name in the air.

"Except, he knew the cannon blast was coming. It sounds like they had no warning this time. And, he did get shot by Natasha's gun in New Mexico." Bruce entered the room, annoyingly not on his side.

"Oh. Holy. Tesla. That's because he didn't know our technology back then. Now he does, you just saw him co-pilot the Quinjet. Do I really need to spell this out for you too, Big Green? His youki acts like infrared light; he can detect trouble before trouble even looks his way. The wavelength of his youki also means this can project farther than Rudolph's magic nose over there." Tony edged out, no one looked convinced. An uncontrollable bubble of rage built up in the base of Tony's throat. A rant was coming on.

"Stark is right! Lord Sesshomaru always comes back, and he wouldn't let anything bad happen to Barton!" Rin smiled and Jaken nodded resolutely next to her.

"Lord Sesshomaru will not be defeated! You have seen him fight!" Tony heard Jaken and that was it.

No one seemed phased.

Tony never more wanted to shake someone. He picked up his scotch glass instead.

Tony had examined his youki, extracted and separated his toxin. Sesshomaru wasn't just a super weapon, he was pretty much the ultimate weapon. Tony couldn't design a better one, and one half of SHIELD wanted it controlled, the other half wanted it destroyed. He knew Sesshomaru. He knew he was alive, and everyone else underestimated and doubted him, even Loki!

"But…." Steve started and Tony shot him a dark, fiery look.

"We have to assume the worst-case scenario Tony. Not all of us can have the liquid confidence you have at this juncture." Natasha's glare could render medusa to stone but he wasn't going to budge.

"I can't believe we are still having his conversation!" Tony slammed his glass down on the table with a solid bang. "He told me his parents bred only for him to be the ultimate weapon. Hell, Natasha you told us his name meant Killing Perfection! I couldn't envision a better weapon than him. His youki not only acts as an early detection system, but also rapidly heals him. His toxin? Best of both worlds. It can corrode through basically anything and the neurotoxin aspect renders most living things dead. Bambi here brought him here to save our planet. I can't believe all you guys think a bomb so simple a fifteen year old could make out of a bag of shit and some spark plugs could bring him down!" Tony knew he sounded drunk, but he didn't care because it didn't mean what he was saying wasn't true.

"He might not be the ultimate warrior like you, Point Break," Tony continued, pointing the holographic readouts to Thor who looked a little surprised.

"Or the ultimate botanist nurse like you, Reindeer Games," He motioned to Loki who furrowed his black eyebrows in abject confusion.

"But, you came to me. Of anyone, you all should trust me. At least on this. I know weapons, and exactly what Sesshomaru is capable of. The ultimate weapon thing, that's not who he is as a person, Demon, whatever, but that is what he has trained to be at his core. We need to weed out who in the
hell in SHIELD wants him dead and why! Not sit here like we are already writing their fucking obituaries. I have never underestimated him, and it's bullshit you're all doing it now." Tony officially let out all the anger he had pent up inside of him. He was done.

He took a final swig of his Scotch glass and put the glass down on his workshop table with a final clang. There was scotch everywhere.

"I agree with Stark." Tony looked up to Loki, whose eyes glittered in warmth. Good, he wasn't going to lose his mind when they needed it most. "Our priority should be figuring out who in SHIELD is a part of this faction, and why they want him dead." Loki finished and Tony sighed loudly and drunkenly.

"Fi-nal-ly! To think the first person who trusts what I have to say is the God of fucking Calamity over my friends." Tony rolled his eyes as they all heard the familiar buzz of a cellphone going off. They all checked their phones until Bruce's face lit up in recognition, and confusion.

"It's Polly….the uh tattoo- ice cream girl." Bruce's face grimaced a bit at the wrong timing and Natasha sprang into action.

"Answer it. It's too much of a coincidence." Natasha pretty much ordered. Bruce hastily thumbed up on his phone as Tony motioned to Jarvis to flip the conversation up on hologram to record it.

"Uh, Hello, Polly?" Bruce started and Natasha's blue eyes blazed and immediately grabbed the phone from Bruce's hands.

"Hello! This is Polly with Indigo Dragon Ice Cream shop!" Polly began and immediately Tony saw Rin's face scrunch in confusion.

"That's not the name of her ice cream shop…" Rin started, tilting her head and Natasha quick as a viper stole the phone from Bruce's hand.

"Hi, this is Natasha Romanoff." She crisply stated into the phone, Bruce slumped in faux defeat.

"Oh hello! I am calling to let you know that your Ice Cream cake order for Bedclothes and Storm God is ready for pick up!" Tony's face hit up in smug victory. Only Sesshomaru called Steve and Thor that. They were fine.

"Oh great, I'm glad it's ready." Natasha tapped her foot, a rare display of impatience.

"Yes! Their 'Happy Anniversary' cake is decorated, complete with specialty blue ribbon piping. Marion, Etta, and I would like to congratulate them on such a happy three years of marriage. Unfortunately, we are temporarily out of rocky road ice cream, but the good doctor, informed us that you could supply your own ice cream. If you could come by and pick it up in ten minutes you'll get our super Ultron discount!" Polly sounded a bit stilted on the phone, as if reading certain words with more emphasis than others. Tony had no idea what to make of it but he could see Natasha purse her full lips.

The whole Steve, Thor marriage thing would have been actually pretty funny in any other circumstance. Shame.

"Yes of course. Thank you for having it ready so early," Natasha sounded in her own head as she handed the phone back to Bruce. Tony stilled, the scotch giving him clarity once more.

He had heard or seen one of those words before. Ultron…the hack.
"Natasha, what is going on?" Steve asked first, Tony looked up hazily, he probably shouldn't have taken that last swig of scotch, but the dramatic effect it had was too good to pass up.

"That was Clint. It was a code. Indigo is our safe word. He and Pretty Boy are safe. That's the good news. The bad news is that 'Happy Anniversary' is code for if SHIELD were to ever decide to target one of us. SHIELD was after Clint, not Pretty Boy." Natasha paused and Tony saw Loki's magic flare in anger. Bruce, now holding his phone, looked particularly confused.

'Oh wow, for once Sesshomaru wasn't the trouble magnet. Damn Clint. I know it should have been me going with him….what a waste.' Tony crossed his arms defensively.

"That makes no sense either…why would they target Clint?!" Steve's blue eyes were narrowed in confusion and Natasha shifted her weight.

"They're tying up loose ends, Clint thinks they have a ten minute window before they really close in. The 'good doctor' didn't refer to Bruce, it referred to Selvig. SHIELD has their own codes, Clint and I have ours. The secret code for Selvig is 'Blue Duck'. Someone in SHIELD, not Fury, the nod to 'Rocky Road' which is the ice cream flavor Rin gave him, is making a deal with the Chitauri, the reference to 'blue ribbon'." Natasha took a breath and Tony leaned back, floored.

"Surely you jest, Romanoff. The Mad Titan doesn't make deals. He doesn't want anything you could possibly possess. He wants destruction, and the Tesseract." Loki dramatically swept his hand through the air, green smoke leaving a wake in the air. Fair point.

"Loose ends? Clint and Selvig? What could they possibly have in common…wait Marion..etta." Bruce paused and his eyes caught Tony's.

'Oh no. Not that, ugh Christ. The scepter. The location of the one thing that for the life of me, I couldn't hack SHIELD's servers for. I had a feeling those morons didn't give it back to Point Break.' Tony rubbed the back of his neck and he caught Loki's wide gaze, he turned urgently to Natasha and he closed the distance as if he wanted to grab her.

"Tell me. Tell me you destroyed the scepter. That SHIELD, your governments, Fury, ordered its destruction. It cannot possibly still exist! Thor, tell me you didn't leave it here on Midgard!" Loki panicked, and green magic snaked out. Tony refrained from having Jarvis activate to contain Horns only because he was also curious as to where SHIELD managed to hide the damn thing.

If there was one thing SHIELD definitely shouldn't have, it's the ability to turn anyone into their flying monkeys (Fury's words not his).

And a reference Cap, of course, understood.

And if Tony looked irritated that SHIELD managed to hide of the worst weapons to come out of the Battle of New York, then Loki looked like he was about to strangle then incinerate everyone in a twenty-foot radius.

He knew the 'I am about to snap everyone's neck look' pretty damn well. Too well, just from another source however.

Tony was pulled from his own personal issues, which he was probably a shade too tipsy to deal with anyway, when a spark of green magic flung itself into the wall next to him.

"Brother, I entrusted the magic staff to Midgard's SHIELD. They ensured me—" Thor got cut off
by another green-black magic bolt scorching the wall next to Thor's big noggin. He is gonna charge that scorch mark on his fake magic black Amex.

"You colossal, imbecilic fool!" Bambi's magic sparked off of him and Thor grabbed his shoulders, as if to stabilize him. In true diva fashion, he actually managed to shove Thor off. He shoved off a guy who could uproot an oak tree with his teeth. Natasha shifted, appraising everyone.

She definitely knew something. Figured.

"The scepter, 'Marionette' to Clint and I in the message, 'Merlin' to SHIELD, was too important of a weapon to destroy. Since the Attack on New York, The permanent members of the U.N. UK, USA, Russia, France, and China, demanded that the scepter not remain in any one country for more than one year. It has since been moved from one P5 member country to another in a containment safe.” Natasha explained, and unfortunately Tony wasn't surprised.

All three of those words were in the code he found: Blue Duck, Merlin, Project Ultron.

'So, US, UK, France, Russia, AND China. Please don't say it's in Russia. Paris! Paris is nice this time of year. I can even do London. Gin is growing on me now thanks to a certain hot Demon. I've always wanted to use a British accent in the Ironman suit.' Tony caught an inappropriately timed grin before it got too big.

"So, Clint is trying to say the spies within SHIELD are attempting to steal the scepter, from SHIELD, to give it to the Chitauri?" Steve concluded and Natasha nodded, expression grim.

"And Fury wants to monitor me? He should start with his own people." Bruce muttered. Morons. SHIELD was infested with morons. Morons who managed to hack Jarvis, he felt insulted. Truly.

"Affirmative. Clint didn't give me any other intel than that. SHIELD wants to take Selvig and Clint out, I suppose in case the Chitauri activate the scepter again and their prior mind control programming comes back online." Natasha shot a knowing look to Thor whose expression paled.

"Jane. She may be in danger! She has been stopping in Kingdom of Unity every month to look after Dr. Selvig. I must go, I cannot allow these turncoats to harm him or Jane if she is there!" Thor had Mjolnir in his hand before you could say 'Storm God'.

'Kingdom of Unity? he knew at some point Jane had to have taught him the right name for the land of bad teeth and worse weather.

"Go Thor, we can handle things. Inform us when you get everything worked out." Steve nodded and Thor in a gust of wind rushed out an open window. Key word open. Tony secretly thanked his stars something went right today.

"This…this is very….very dire. You fools. Your entire race must crave extinction! I cannot fathom more idiocy and I have met Vokstagg's kin. Of all… how… this. This!" Loki began to pace, running his hand through his hair.

"Just where is the glowstick of destiny? Please don't say Siberia or somewhere worse like, New Jersey." Tony asked, sounding light to try to make Loki less anxious. He was making him anxious, and he had to hold it together here.

Steve gave him 'that' look.

"What? There is no where worse than New Jersey, except that one cult town in Arizonaaaa…wait, don't say it's in New Mexico, that'd be too poetic. You know, everything comes full circle thing?"
Tony grasped at straws and Natasha's mouth got the tiniest bit hard.

Oh no.. Fucking Siberia.

"Right now…. Shanghai, China. It is actually due to move in a month. We can get to it, but it needs to be a stealth mission." Natasha flatlined.

Pause.

"China? The country that's allied with North Korea and has eradicated generations of people and bleached its own culture… you gave them a mind control weapon?! Oh geez. If we. IF. We survive this; we need to talk about which dictator we give a mind control weapon to." Cap's face got red and Tony have him props. All of that happened after Cap got freezer burn. He had been doing his homework.

Capcicle even made Natasha cross her arms and look away.

"I never said I agreed to this decision. It was the council's. If we want to stop this it has to be a stealth mission." Nat's head swiveled to both Bruce and Tony. "Which leaves you two out." Tony shrugged. He knew stealth simply wasn't his style. Bruce nodded in agreement.

Natasha, in an uncharacteristic move, abruptly grabbed Loki by his shoulders, forcing him to look her in the eyes. Now kiss?

"You need to focus, Loki." Natasha used his real name. "You are the only one who can do this. You need to disguise Steve and I and teleport us to the Shanghai Pearl Tower. The scepter is a secret vaulted bunker. I can get us in, but we need to move now." Natasha attempted to calm Loki but he only began to sprout black and crackling vines on the floor.

"You don't…you don't understand. I can't get near it, much less touch it. It will unravel my mind! It will glass over everything again!" Loki started to twitch and Natasha let him go.

"You can't touch it, neither of you! Not even you, Stark, with Sho's residual youki, can handle it! Anyone who touches that scepter by now will be fully under the control of the Other! My sealing spell, which had prevented most from hearing its melodic call, would be rendered useless by now. Especially with the Other being in such close proximity to Midgard to embolden the magic! The magic tether of scepter to the Other is too great!" Loki began to implode and Tony swallowed.

"So, what do we do Loki? What options do we have? We can't let them have the scepter to use it against us." Steve insisted and Loki paced, the vines growing and Tony could almost hear Loki's pulse beat erratically from where he stood.

"We have to…somehow interfere with the scepter's magic. We have to find a way to render it inert…." And then, as if they were in a movie, Tony looked up from the spot on the floor he was staring at and into Loki's eyes, both coming to the same realization, at the same time.

Youki. Magic. If of equal strength they negated each other…. Loki's vines disappeared as they both whipped their heads over to Jaken.

"Jaken. You are coming with us." Loki commanded and Jaken, who had up until that point, had been watching the surfing video on Tony's hologram with Rin, jumped up startled.

"Me?! Not a chance! I will await here for my Lord's return. I want nothing to do with your magic and pearl towers!" Jaken backed up.
"Your youki should be strong enough to negate the scepter's magic. You are the only one who can touch it and allow me to get close enough to it to teleport us back here. It is too risky to go find Sho or await his return!" Loki insisted which only made Jaken quiver nervously.

"Jaken. Don't you think your Lord Sesshomaru will praise you for your bravery and reward you for helping us out with such a dangerous quest?" Natasha, clever as can be, sweet talked Little Green and squatted down to his height in her leggings and tank top. Jaken's large yellow eyes caught on and he puffed out his chest.

"She's right. You say you're not useless, but now's the time to prove it." Tony bounced off Natasha flawlessly.

"I'll show you all! I shall bring honor to my Lord and prove myself a mighty Demon! And surely Lord Sesshomaru will reward me!" Jaken hopped on the ground for effect and Rin jumped in excitement.

"You can do it Jaken! You can help out Uncle Loki! Lord Sesshomaru will be so pleased!" Rin cheered, Tony immediately vindicated about giving Jaken the scotch. He was going all the 'liquid courage' he could get.

"If this does not end in complete disaster, I may entertain taking up one of Stark's wagers." Look looked grossly pale. He needed to chill out.

"I'll wear that horrible red and gold silk kimono thing again if Toady does something cool. If he doesn't, you have to tell everyone the Kiki story." Tony couldn't resist. Cobra Commander rose an eyebrow in intrigue.

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about. I will agree to your wager." Loki had that glint in his eye that he was scheming something probably super fucking irritating for him.

"Enough pillow talk. Let's go." Natasha was in total assassin mode.

"Right, first rule of stealth is to never let them see you're coming. Rendering you all invisible and teleporting you to the city would use too much of my magic and may trigger SHIELD's detection devices. So, the second rule of stealth, if they do see you, best not be, you." Loki's lips curled up and before Tony could say 'knew it' Natasha, Steve, and Toady were all disguised as tourists.

Chinese tourists. A family. They even had selfie sticks around their necks and 'I 愛 SH' tour guide to shirts. Jaken had on Shanghai Disney T shirt.

There was a Disneyland in Shanghai?

Loki even had one of those flags that tour guides use.

Tony burst out laughing.

"I don't feel comfortable doing this, Nat. Couldn't we just wear a mask?" Cap, now creepily asian looking, was feeling his own face like a blind person. This was great.

"Oh yes and when it comes off you can explain to Midgard's media why their noble Captain America is stealing from another province and SHIELD. Now, quickly gather before I change my mind." Loki, now Yuki, began to make his green smokey magic 'ring around the rosey' again.

He heard Jaken squawk something as they disappeared from sight.
Him, Bruce and Little Miss Sunshine remained. Why did everything suddenly feel really, really awkward?

He hoped Sesshomaru would return soon.

"I don't like this Tony. Loki is still about as stable as an active faultline and I don't believe even Natasha has an accurate idea of what they are about to go face. And Jaken?! What if he can't cancel out the scepter's magic? He hasn't shown he can manipulate his youki like Sesshomaru can. And let's not even get into him." Bruce slumped back against the wall, pinching the bridge of his nose like Tony had seen him done a thousand times before.

It made him look like a middle aged soccer mom who forgot the oranges for the halftime snack.

"I was right about him being ok, you know. Loki will be fine; treasure quests are all he practically did growing up. Natasha has probably killed more men with dental floss and a pair of Maui Jim sunglasses than are in that bunker. I am not worried about her, and neither should you be. Oh, fun fact, Toady said Sesshomaru trained him just like he trained you, so you aren't that special." Tony walked out of his lab motioning Bruce to follow him, which of course he did.

"Don't worry Banner, my Lord will return soon and everything will be ok again! Right, Stark?" Rin spun around and Tony had never been more convinced that Rin and Bruce were the most opposite people on this planet.

"Sure thing, Sunshine." Tony now wondered if Sesshomaru coming back would go as smoothly in actuality as he saw it playing out in his head. Tony leaned to no...

But he would be coming back. In one piece. He could trust that Clint would have said something to the effect of 'Oh we survived it, but Fancy Pant's lost a leg! Well, if he did, he could grow it back apparently. He had seen that line on his arm before, the first time they had sex. It was almost indiscernable.

While the Chitauri's rifle rayblast did burn Sesshomaru, as well as his own repulsors and Loki's magic did, Sesshomaru could and had always healed himself. He was constantly evolving.

Everyone else was wrong except him. He was coming back this time. Delivery not Pick up.

Yet, the waiting game was something Tony always inevitably lost. So, with Big Green and Little Miss Sunshine, he decided to go to work. Idle hands equaled idle mind and Tony as rule number one didn't tolerate either.

"Jarvis, let's give good ol' Rhodey a call. It's been too long since we had a good chat." Tony smirked, it was showtime.

Jarvis connected the video call and immediately he saw Rhode with a loose tie slung around his neck like a $300 noose.

"Rhooolloooodey how's ki—" Tony started and was predictably and immediately cut off.

"Tony, no. Not today. I'm still putting out fires for you, Loki, and Mr. Nirvana. I also have Atlantic Command breathing down my neck about SHIELD not yet turning over ownership of the IFO 'identified fallen object' that fell into the Hudson, per their agreement SOHO Accords. But I am sure whatever you have to say is going to make this look like a cake walk." Rhode sounded exhausted. He looked like he needed a good massage and a cheeseburger.

And SOHO Accords? He missed something. Probably something boring.
"Well that took all the fun out of that. I need to bring D.E.M.O.N.S. online, speeding up my timeline a bit. I already got the unofficial go ahead from the Vikram space center in India, Svalrak in Norway, the Alcântara space center in Brazil, Woodmere Test Range in Australia, Oh, almost forgot Egypt. I just need one more on the pacific… you still on good terms with Head Honcho Hough at Vandenberg Airforce base right? He could probably call the prez to get this going. That should do it… maybe one more over the Atlantic…” Tony trailed off. No, that should do it.

"Tony, another one?. Have you lost your goddamn mind? How did you even get the green light from those other launch sites?! Is this your idea of a joke?" Rhodey had stopped typing and really looked at him.

"No joke. I just invited some extra people to my Gala, even on short notice they were all able to make it, or at least send some people to speak on their behalf. You should have seen who they sent from Brazil, total kiss ass by the way." Tony rambled, smirking all the way. He could tell when Rhodey was easing over to his side.

"Tony. I can't get the go ahead from Vandenberg. We haven't even fully tested what D.E.M.O.N.S. can do." Rhodey put his head in his hand like he was about to get a migrane.

"Oh, I had no idea that Uncle Sam was being so cautious over preventing not only the extermination of the human species, but also the untimely detonation of our planet. Well in that case I can always just call up JAXA who runs Tanegashima Space Center in Japan. Naoki Okumura and I rubbed elbows at a number of events. It would just be a total shame if the United States didn't get in on launching D.E.M.O.N.S.. You know now since our magical space invaders can most likely be cloaked from our traditional means of detection from NASA and Sesshomaru's youki is perfect for detecting astral bodies and threats." Tony knew he had that shit-eating grin on his face because Bruce rolled his eyes.

Hook.

"In fact, Rhodey, let me go ahead and call Okumura. I already sent him the D.E.M.O.N.S. satellite, his pimply intern at my Gala said he was interested." Tony twisted around for Jarvis to pull up the hologram. "It's just now like 7 am in Tokyo, he'll be up."

"Tony, what? How does he already have the satellite to even pull this off?!!" Rhodey straightened up in alarm and confusion.

"I'm a man of action. All the launch sites have D.E.M.O.N.S., they just await my activation key and go-ahead codes. In fact, they all arrived before I even met them in the Gala. We need to get ahead of this without SHIELD's interference. Oh, and spill about the SOHO Accords, I haven't done the reading apparently." Tony loved when his plans worked out exactly as he knew they would. Which was of course most of the time.

"Look Tony, I don't know how you managed to get these governments to go behind SHIELD's back and authorize these launches, but the US government's official position is that we have to share intel with SHIELD. I'm not saying that the current administration is…thrilled that they made the unilateral decision to nuke New York, but after the Chitauri came back, UN drafted and had signed the SOHO Accords, which you should…really know about already. The SOHO Accord was to limit SHIELD's power and to force them to give up jurisdiction of the IFO in exchange for intel sharing But we havent gotten the IFO yet. Even if I could convince Colonel Hough this is a good idea, there is no way he can convince our Commander in Chief to allow it. You launching your own D.E.M.O.N.S. from your own tower caused enough of a headache for me. We don't even know if we can trust what Mr. Nirvana can do." Rhodes sounded even more exhausted than he had when he first called him. Tony knew he could wear him down. He had written the book on it.
Though a sour feeling ran through Tony's throat that the US government viewed Sesshomaru as one-time novelty, not someone who had an ability that mission critical to the safety of their planet. And that they took SHIELD more seriously than him. Him!

Tony, offended on two fronts, doubled down and his mouth ran dry.

"Rhodes. I'm not asking for your help, I'm giving you the chance to get in on the action. It's time to shelf the political niceties and get our hands dirty, something big is about to go down. SHIELD just botched something really bad and this time it's not on our turf. Think big wall, badly made products, and even worse tourists." Tony laid his trap and even though he knew that Rhodes knew it was a lure, he knew he would swallow the bait.

Line.

"...China? The PRC and SHIELD have never gotten along, that makes no sense. You can't just say something like this and not—" He cut Rhodey off. Nothing about anything made any sense anymore. Didn't he get it? A titan from another galaxy was about to blow up their planet over a magic blue cube.

"SHIELD blew up their own Quinjet with a fuel line bomb over Iowa, Rhodes. The FAA will hear about it soon I am sure, and maybe SHIELD will claim pilot error or training exercise gone wrong but that's them playing a game of CYA they always win. Clint was piloting it, Sesshomaru was too, and SHIELD knew it and tried to take them out. Oh, that's not even the half of it." Tony just had to reel Rhodes in as he brought up the information about the SOHO accords.

"Jesus Christ Tony. Are they alright? Could they chute out? What..." Rhodes immediately asked then trailed off.

"No recorded chute out, but I'm not worried. Because of this I got confirmed what was embedded in that code that hacker left in Jarvis is bad news. Project Ultron, it's big, it's ugly, and it's about to be an international incident that SHIELD let fester. SHIELD hasn't learned their lesson. They aren't going to abide by the SOHO Accords either. They hacked private property, tried to kill their own agents, and tried to kill the hero who saved New York. Get on board. Don't be caught with your fly down when we need your finger on the trigger. We need D.E.M.O.N.S. online, and the permutation I calculated would work 9% better with Vanderberg as a launch point instead of Tanegashima but don't think I won't give them the nod if it will save our ass." Tony stopped pulling his punches. It was true, D.E.M.O.N.S. would work better if they launched from Vandenberg, and he would rather have a backup in Japan than in the US where SHIELD had more direct access.

Sinker.

"Ok goddamn Tony, Point made. I'll get Hough on the line. He still owes me from Vegas a few years ago. Damn, this is going sideways...bombing their own guys on purpose? Give it to me straight, Tony, do you think Clint and Mr. Nirvana made it out?" Rhodes looked like he ate some of Nat's cooking. Never again Nat.

"Yeah, it takes a lot more to take out my boyfriend and a top assassin than that." Now... that sort of slipped out. Tony could have blamed the youki in his arc reactor no longer spinning cold, or the scotch still flowing through his system, or his excitement over the unveiling of D.E.M.O.N.S...but that didn't cause it. It had to be Frogger. Had to be.

He just let it slip that he was in a relationship with a Demon Lord. When he kind of sort of wasn't yet....or was he? Eh. Semantics.... Damn. He just had to say it....
Wasn't it normal for the first person he'd tell to his best friend?

Even if he had no idea about the whole sex thing in the first place?

"...Tony. I can't even begin to explain to you how much of a bad... No. I'm pretty sure you do know much of a bad idea that is and that's why you're doing it. Just for once. Once, can you give yourself, or me or anyone an easy time?" Rhodes really did look like he was about to be sick and Tony fully grinned in victory. Victory over what he wasn't certain sure, but he didn't care.

"Hi Rhodey! It's ok, my Lord likes Stark back!" Rin jumped to his side. To this point she had been relatively quiet, too quiet. If he knew kids, she was probably plotting something.

"See, Kid tested, Pepper approved!" Tony threw a thumbs up and Tony caught Bruce out of the corner of his eye shake his head. So much for bro support.

"...I'm hanging up to call Hough. I'm contemplating never accepting another call from you again." Rhodes announced, unfazed by Rin, hung up. She was a pretty cute kid. One who Natasha was training. So cute and potentially terrifying, like a Honey Badger.

"That went well!" Tony threw up his hand for a high five and Rin smacked it with acceptable gusto.

"Boyfriend? Are you guys going to get promise rings now?" Bruce attempted humor again.

"We're past that stage." Tony winked and Bruce grimaced. "But he already has some matching tattoos...do you think he will let me call them racing stripes?" Tony grabbed his phone and began to type furiously into it and instantly the big wigs from India, Norway, Brazil, Australia, Egypt, and Okumura came on the holos.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I assume you all received your party favors. It's time to activate everyone's but yours Okumura. You're my failsafe. Please input the following activation code into the D.E.M.O.N.S. receiver '2-h-0-t-4-h-e-l-/' then the country code for dialing your country.

The guy from Egypt gave him a foul look. Nice guy.

"Really, Mr. Stark?" The guy from India... Some name of some minor importance asked.

"Passwords are supposed to be fun. Having your name in the history books for helping deter an alien army hell bent on our complete annihilation is what you're here for, so don't mock the hand that feeds you." Tony scolded, half serious.

Everyone wanted their fifteen minutes of fame and their name as a footnote in some dusty history tombe.

He'd give it to them. He had already learned the lesson the fame was only sometimes worth it.

That's when the line came back through... Rhodey, that was quick!

"Rhodey, join the party!" Tony gestured at the rag tag group on the screens.

"Hough is good for launch, I'll feed him the codes. I don't know how he convinced our Commander and Chief. But you know Tony, as well as I do, that once this thing is up, Loki can't be tracked." Rhodey said, and yeah, Tony knew that.

He caught the murmuring and gasping in a few different languages from his screens.
"If SHIELD and I can't track him, then our enemy who wants to hunt Loki down and drag him back to his own personal Horns Hilton can't either. Anyway, who do you trust more: an organization that tried to nuke New York, hack my tower, and keep a spaceship that's in violation of the SOHO Accords, or Thor's brother who hates these aliens so much he is willing to come here to Earth and get the shit kicked out of him to get revenge?" Tony challenged back. He did let slip about SHIELD hacking his tower but did it on purpose.

He was met with utter silence from everyone.

"Thought so. Enough with the foreplay, let's get to the fireworks." Tony with a few clicks sent each site and encrypted key.

The go-ahead codes.

"I just sent the go-ahead goes. They are synchronized to launch when I hit this big button. I didn't have to actually make a big button, but I couldn't resist...You know touch screens can only give you so much tactile satisfaction." Tony held up his button with glee.

It even said 'go'!

No one even cracked a smile, well except Rin. She had that look that kids always give when they want something you want. The puppy dog eyes. The pursed lips and the trembling.

"Yes Little Miss Sunshine, you can push the 'go' button." Tony rolled his eyes and huffed. Obviously, he didn't really mean the attitude.

"You're letting a 6 year old girl launch D.E.M.O.N.S.?" The guy from Australia's mouth dropped open.

"Hey, cool it. Rin's dad is the only reason we have this Early Warning Line in the first place." Rhodey defended. "I met her at a crab bake and she has good manners, unlike her father who melted a fork and ruined my favorite side arm." Rhodes continued and Tony caught the smile in his voice.

"Can I press it now Stark?!" Rin beamed and how could he resist that?

"On one condition, you have to say: 'On your mark, get set, Fury was wrong, Tony was right from the get-go!" Tony gestured Rin just tilted her head to the side.

Pause.

Tough crowd.

"Go master Jaken and Uncle Loki!" Rin pressed the 'go' button and Jarvis simultaneously brought up feed from each missile site.

Alarms, then smoke, then fire, then... lift off. From Norway, India, Egypt, Brazil, Australia, and Cali.

Tony's arc reactor lit up and glowed and he knew he had that stupid little boy face he always had when something he did was about to go so, so right.

Sesshomaru soon would see what he was really capable of. Not just tinkering in a lab on small scale gadgets, but a whole transorbital Early Warning Line to use against Thanos.
He fidgeted with a fork he found on the living room counter. Eureka! What a sight. it actually was all working out!

"They're all flying true. They're all entering the stratosphere in sync. Tony… you did it." Bruce was looking primarily at Egypt whose satellite launched first by a hair.

"Once they hit 200,000km from earth they will each unleash their payload of 90,000 youki capsules to release Sailor Moons super 'Astral-body and infra-red detecting super juice and voila! Big Brother Tony Stark is watching you, Thanos. Your play." Tony voice dipped seriously at the end and the faces of everyone, save Rin, glanced to him gravely.

"We put our trust, our money, and the lives of our countrymen in your hands, Mr. Stark. This was a gamble I—" The man with zero sense of humor from Egypt was cut off when the first signal beeped.

And the intro to Rin Tin Tin k-9 cop TV show started playing. Now!

Tony actually held his breath, though to be honest he swore Bruce did too, as the youki capsules ejected. And like those cheesy synchronized dancers in the Olympics, exploded in style.

Jarvis showed it right, the permutations were right on the money.

The readouts danced in Tony's eyes: D.E.M.O.N.S. was a success.

"I… I and my country are a part of history. We are, not SHIELD nor any organization, holds our fate in our hands. If there is anything you need from us, the Egyptian government owes you an ear Mr. Stark." Tony had even forgotten that the blowhard from Egypt had said anything.

"Yeah, yeah, like I didn't pick you guys for nothing." Tony picked them wisely, they worked for his algorithm and they were big enough players to stand up to SHIELD without being in NATO or any other strong enough military alliance to cause a problem.

"Sir, the permutations have operated better than expected, the entire globe has been ensconced in Lord Sesshomharu's youki." Jarvis announced and without so much as a good bye he closed all communications with the other countries except Rhodey.

"You really think this will work don't you? This isn't some sort of personal thing about SHIELD trying to ice your…boyfriend." Rhodey repeated and Tony's chest flooded with lava.

"Whoa, whoa, I don't want you breathing fire down my neck. As long as this thing works, as long as we can get a heads up on these alien assclowns I'm good." Rhodey must have read the anger that flashed across Tony's face.

"Ass clowns? OK I didn't know we were at a tailgate. Yeah, speaking of him I have to figure out where he is so I'll have to hang up. Rest easy Rhodey, we got this." Tony waved goodbye as an ending before Rhodey could protest about more information on the China SHIELD thing.

"Sir, I have recently picked up a faint reading similar to Lord Sesshomarar's youki in Southwest Pensylvania." Jarvis informed, and come to think of it, he sort felt a tug that direction, like a string in his arc reactor led him that direction. A barely there tingle also itched far away. Jaken?

Pennsylvania? Wasn't he just in Iowa? They were nowhere close to each other. He wasn't that fast.

"The signal seems to be airborne moving at a speed of Mach 2." Jarvis continued.
"Did they find a jet?" Bruce asked. Tony's reactor spun, something was up, but he wasn't feeling any tell-tale anxiety.

"Nothing appears on radar sir, not even something as small as a drone." Jarvis brought up all radar towers. What was this?

"Lord Sesshomaru must be in a hurry if he is flying with Barton all the way back!" Rin was hoping from one colored tile to another. It was easy to forget she was just a kid and didn't have anything to play with—

Pause.

"Fly!? He can fly?" Tony heard him ask the dumb question before he could stop himself.

"Lord Sesshomaru can do lots of things! He would fly and Jaken and I would ride behind him on Ah-Un, our dragon. I miss Ah-Un, but I am sure he is safe. Maybe he is with Uncle Inuyasha." Rin wasn't paying much attention to either of them, she was too focused on her floor was lava game.

Tony's brain wasn't cooperating. So, if he could fly... then why didn't he do it more? Why bother with piloting the quinjet?

Did he just want to pilot the quinjet to show he could? What an arrogant, prideful, paranoid show-off.

Tony smirked; he bet he was faster. Which should have been second to the thought that he was more than fine if he was flying home at around twice the speed of sound. But Tony never really had the most healthy of thought patterns.

"If he is carrying Clint bridal style I want a visual JARVIS." Tony tapped his fingers against the counter top with the fork he still had in his hand.

Finally he'd get the delivery he wanted.

Bruce finally moved.

He was being weirdly quiet.

"Tony, I think it's a good time to tell you about what Fury said the other day about the space anomaly he and SHIELD recorded in the sky the day of the press conference." Bruce led and Tony wasn't particularly interested. He was busy multitasking between trying to see videos of his boyfriend going full Superman and quadruple checking D.E.M.O.N.S..

"Whatever Fury has is old news." Tony responded confidently, surveying the readouts from the satellite projections. No visuals on Sesshomaru.

"It has to do with your boyfriend, and our initial predictions of his youki abilities." Tony's protectiveness was piqued. Fury only wanted Sesshomaru for his abilities as a weapon. "Fury had that tone in his voice, along with his line of questioning that meant he wanted more out of Sesshomaru." Bruce adjusted his glasses which meant he was nervous.

Maybe this wasn't old news. Maybe Bruce thought Fury was sniffing around trying to use his boyfriend for his own gain.

"Dish then big green. When did you chit chat to Fury anyway?" Tony racked his brain trying to figure out when Bruce had even the chance to talk to him.
"After I uh, 'transformed' as your crush would put it, and nearly killed that SHIELD tactical team. I came to and Sesshomaru found me shortly after that. He wasn't exactly happy I was 'indecently dressed'. Fury came up, saving me from a fashion police lecture and showed us a picture of a space window, or portal." Bruce explained, taking something out of his pocket he had obviously been holding onto.

Tony remembered the initial tests he ran on Sesshomaru's youki. It already felt like eons ago.

"Fury thought that the space window was too small to be a Chitauri portal, and didn't have the same energy signature either. He also said that the star clusters visible didn't match any system we have mapped or seen yet. I tried to recreate it the best I could in my down time, but even I couldn't match any known systems to it." Bruce passed Tony a zip drive. Old school.

'Well, gotta give credit where credit is due, he didn't have access to my lab.' Tony flipped the zip drive in his fingers a few times before he had Jarvis bring it up.

"Those Astral patterns, theoretically, well truly, physically shouldn't exist. They're too many stars and they're too close together to be possible." Tony squinted at the readouts.

"I agree. Remember when we discovered that due to Sesshomaru's youki he could sense infra red and could detect Astral bodies? When Fury brought it up, Sesshomaru knew what he was talking about. He wasn't surprised at all and said we shouldn't be concerned about it." Bruce was leading him and Tony was following.

"Little Green did say he used to open up portals to the Demon Underworld." Bruce gave him a look. "...yeah, I know, let's not let Steve know that he used to make doorways to hell. But Frogger said he couldn't do it anymore. This is gotta be something new he can do, if Loki could do it he would have done it by now, and I definitely think we can rule Thor out. Fury probably figures that Moonie is behind it, too." Tony speculated, he wasn't sure what this meant except that he trusted Sesshomaru that if it wasn't something he should be concerned about, it wasn't anything terrible.

Probably. Unless he was doing something reckless again.

Tony's head began to hurt. They had a lot to talk about. Tony hated 'talks'.

Why was he going through all of this again?

"Sir, I have visual on Lord Sesshomaru, he is approaching the tower now." Jarvis pulled up the visuals.

"Yay! I am going to go show Lord Sesshomaru my target I shot!" Rin shot up and out and Tony scratched his beard.

"Is that....is he a ball of light?" Tony sprinted up to the roof of his tower, for the second time in his life after this stupid Demon. But...he had to see this for himself. He vaguely heard Bruce's less-hurried footsteps behind him.

He squinted but saw it. A dazzling stream of light, white and crackling with energy. This couldn't be Sesshomaru. It wasn't physically possible. Matter couldn't just turn into light.

Especially light that moved this slowly, with this much control. It didn't make sense. It was beautiful and oddly frightening. Like, where did the line between science, magic, and youki stop and start? Was there even a line?

His arc reactor whirled in overdrive. He anxiously fidgeted, maybe this was some sort of trick?
Maybe this wasn't Sesshomaru? Either way, he had to confront Sesshomaru and talk about five dozen different subjects and it all began to overwhelm Tony.

Bruce said something, well maybe he did. Maybe he didn't because his eyes were locked onto the ball of light like a targeting system.

He didn't even notice he had stopped breathing really until the ball of light slowed morphed and lowered onto the roof of his Tower.

Clint was a heap, bitching about something Tony couldn't care less about.

Sesshomaru stood in one piece, hair everywhere per usual. Jaken's staff poked out from behind his back.

It had been a long while since he had seen him in his Japanese kimono outfit thing. He definitely looked more imposing, more…aristocrat, something that he couldn't relate to or touch. Which was crap because he was basically treated like royalty, so he shouldn't feel one-upped.

He hated the relief that fluttered up his stomach and into his chest. It didn't make any sense that he would feel this way. He knew he was fine, damnit. He hated that Sesshomaru could just change himself and someone else into light like it wasn't a big deal. He hated that he told Rhodey and Bruce he wanted to commit to him because he infuriated him.

Commitments were too much work. Maybe he should just abandon the idea entirely, Sailor Moon obviously still thought he slept with Christine. Maybe he should keep it that way. Maybe his mouth went too far this time.

Tony's legs went too far when they carried him towards Sesshomaru, his eyes were closed behind those crimson eyelids that matched his suit to a T.

He was holding…daffodils? Tony smiled. He knew who those had to be for. Sap.

"Lord Sesshomaru! I have practiced with the firearm Natasha gave me and I shot the target! See!" Tony saw Rin scamper up like a puppy to Sesshomaru and Tony stopped in his tracks, he didn't want to intrude on their moment.

It was after Sesshomaru slowly opened his eyes, gave the flowers to Rin that suddenly they were close. Really close.

Damn his super speed.

His nostrils were flared, ears were down, and dark circles ringed his wide eyes.

"You haven't showered. You reek of human spirits, sweat, and your usual musk." Sesshomaru spoke lowly and with a touch of curiosity. Tony was thrown, but recovered.

"Ok, reek? Not only is that rude but also untrue. I'll have you know my 'usual musk' was almost made into a cologne." Despite being basically verbally assaulted he couldn't help but a grin to creep to his face. Was this real? "And really this is the conversation we are having?"

Weren't they supposed to be talking about something else? Tony knew he had seen this whole thing go differently in his head.

"You don't still smell of that woman, as you should if you coupled with her." Sesshomaru murmured and that put Tony on his heels. He didn't even have to convince him, so well, that was…
"Maybe because I didn't. Maybe you shouldn't have tried to kill me in my own house after I washed your hair and everything. Maybe I shouldn't haven't have told Rho—"

Tony immediately stopped talking when Sesshomaru dove his face down to the crook of his neck. His fangs and lips grazed his neck and he swore heard a deep inhale.

Was he sniffing him? Nuzzling? This had to be awkward because Tony was more than a few good inches shorter than he was.

"Ok, maybe turn about is fair game for me licking the blood off your neck thing, but this might be bad timing." Tony's heart was thudding in his chest. Why was this making his heart pound when they had done a lot much more raunchy maneuvers in the past with him?

Why was he fighting a smile? Like a big smile, one that he wasn't going to make in front of just anyone. Especially Bruce. He'd just use it against him. Or runt, she'd say something creepy and sage-like like kids can do at the worst times.

Why did he feel like everything was going to be alright when everything was clearly, clearly not? Loki, Natasha, Cap, and Frogger were neck deep in SHIELD shit and Fury had probably already called the Tower three dozen times and automatically got rerouted to Comcast customer service. Things were not really OK, but that wash of relief kept him sturdy.

He wasn't on the cliff alone anymore.

Sesshomaru's claws had pricked his shoulder through his shirt, and he knew that stupid boa thing was gonna get fur all over him. Again.

The tremble in Sesshomaru's warm grip and face barely registered with Tony. It resonated through him as a hum, or like someone plucked a guitar string.

"I see. This Sesshomaru has…" Tony could barely hear his whispered voice against his neck and Tony pushed him off gently. His armor wasn't on, maybe it weighed too much? That didn't matter though. He didn't want to hear whatever the hell the Demon Lord was about to say because really, and he hated to admit it: Jaken was right.

"So dramatic, are you taking lessons from Loki? Off. Like now, you're fine. It's fine. In fact, you're making it worse covering me in fur." Tony complained hollowly and Sesshomaru's face remained blank. For a Demon Lord with more pride than he did, he didn't need words to know Sesshomaru knew he fucked up. Whatever. Like he hadn't before countless times too.

They were a trainwreck. There was no way making this official would be a good idea.

Yet…Rhodey too was right, Tony loved a good bad idea.

"Ok. Cute. Glad you two made up or…whatever that was, but for the last time. Where is Loki?"

Tony turned to Clint who had finally found his sealegs, or whatever.

Tony gave Bruce a look. The. Look. Tony instead brushed fluff off his shirt.

"Um, Clint, well, he's off with the others, including Jaken believe it or not, to go get the Scepter. So far, we haven't had any contact because it's a stealth mission. Loki had a plan he seemed real confident in though." Bruce sucked his teeth, looking to Tony for assistance. He was such a bad lie-by-omission..er…ever.
Maybe they'd be back soon, they can talk strategy and he would let Sesshomaru fuck his brains out in his bed in a few hours. Lunchtime quickie.

"I can sense Jaken because of the barrier you erected over this entire realm. Impressive, Stark. I never expected to be able to sense another Demonic presence on the opposing side of this world." Sesshomaru curled a finger to his lip. Tony saw the slight upward tilt of his lips anyway. Tony wanted to bite his finger. No his lip. No everything. Damnit, Tony focus.

"They're across the planet? Where is the scepter?" Clint fired back quickly, too quickly. Was Clint going to be one of those clingy lovers that demanded Loki to instragram his trip or something?

"Ugh, Shanghai under some architect's worst nightmare of a tower. What a crowded hive-mind that gaudy city is. People there have no sense of personal space, and who can really eat that many crayfish and dumplings? Don't get me started on the kareoke." Tony glanced between Sesshomaru and Clint. Clint's jaw dropped and Sesshomaru sighed through his nose, slicing his gaze back to Clint.

"What? What did I say? Was it the Kareoke?" Tony asked, knowing full well he probably didn't really want the answer.

Tony's chest then seized in a horrible knot of what he could only relate to a hard radar ping.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you, thank you for all your kind comments!

I hope you enjoyed this second part of the chapter! :)

I would love to know what you think of how its going so far. I am trying my hardest to keep everyone somewhat in character! Soon we will see how poor Loki and friends are doing!

-TL
Loki and the Siren's Song

Loki and the Siren's Song

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Loki, already a jostled knot of nerves, assessed his stealth team. This such was hilariously terrible idea. There was so much tactically that could go uproariously wrong.


Jaken's youki might not be strong enough to negate the scepter magic. The little Demon could also just drop the damn thing! They could be already too late and this was an elaborate trap to lure him to this city literally on the other side of Midgard! He, Thor, and Sesshomaru were separated, and they worked much better together. He recalled the scorpion Demons quite well.

'A great strategy for Thanos would be to separate us, and we are falling for it, especially since Thor is alone. Thor can more than take care of himself but it's bad strategy regardless to let him go alone.' Loki cursed to himself, still infuriated the mortals had not disposed of the cursed scepter. But really, it was just quite funny.

Ideally Sesshomaru, Stark, and Thor would be the best team, with Natasha to even them out. If either Thor or Sesshomaru managed to fall under the scepter control Stark, Natasha and the other could subdue him.

'It took two years to thaw my mind, to break the glass, to recompile my memories, to restructure my emotions. I can't do it a second time. I didn't even fully succeed the first time. There are pockets of time missing. I have no idea how I know how to play billiards. I can't remember how I got Ichival, Odin's bow. I have no idea how two of the crystals Sesshomaru and I treasure quested for came into my possession. I know there are critical moments that Thor and I have shared that I cannot remember. There are some memories that may not have even happened. I still feel irrational anger towards owls, and I don't know why.' Loki accepted long ago his mind was incomplete.

'If I wield the scepter again, if I fall under its control, I won't recover.' Loki had composed himself, he reined in his nervousness to the point where Romanoff seemed convinced he had himself together. He put his hands in his pockets to hide their trembling.

Loki had glamored them all into people who looked ethnically like the mortals who came from this region of Midgard. He glamored Rogers' shield into a parasol. He did not approve of it, but he would have to get over it.

'I had expected Stark to get intoxicated. I had not expected him to not only have such trust in Sho's survival. He has such a strident opinion on him. Stark may just understand him after all.' Loki remembered exactly what he said, it warmed him to speak of his friend so. He knew what it felt like to be always underestimated, and many did the same to Sho.

Stark's opinion on himself also caught him off guard. He had never thought of himself as a healer, or someone who had the capacity to create or mend. The Other had transformed him into a weapon. It perplexed him that their weapons expert had not thought of him as such.
"Shanghai is twelve hours ahead of us, so it's 5:51am Monday the 19th here. Let's try to get in and out before rush hour hits." Natasha informed, Loki didn't need the information. He took in the pink and silver pearl tower, he had seen it before, it was an iconic landmark for the province of China in Midgard. This teleportation spell was far easier than the one he used to take himself, Thor, Rin and Natasha to Asgard, to which he was thankful.

It also didn't stop him from quickly raiding Stark's lab mid teleport for extra youki capsules, and some of Blitzen. He had given Stark the last of that particular poison. Stark had also been wrong about one thing, he had been keeping tabs on what Stark had been up to, more or less.

The capsules would prove useful when he teleported into a Midgardian city outside of Sho's proximity barrier. It wouldn't due that he would be detected on a stealth mission.

Which is why mid-teleport he popped one of the five youki capsules so he hopefully wouldn't be detected. He had to fight his instinct to not immediately nullify the youki with his magic. He feeling oddly dirty dousing himself in his best friend's youki without his permission.

"Nice thinking on the youki capsules. Tony will be pissed you stole from him though." Romanoff's mouth had quirked into a smile he knew well.

"I can't find a single heartstring worth tugging to care." He flashed a thin smile. He had an ominous feeling they were going to need his magic. A lot of it.

"What sort of security are we talking about here Natasha?" Rogers asked. Loki closed his eyes and stretched out his senses, there were too many mortals in this city to make out threats from peasants. He would have to expend more magic to determine who he was truly up against.

It concerned him greatly, who exactly within SHIELD was speaking to the Other. Or someone within the ranks of the Mad Titan. Loki knew Thanos preferred for others to do his dirty work, but he never made deals he intended on keeping. And he never wasted time on deals with anyone with no standing or power.

The scepter was extremely dangerous, but was its importance to Thanos so severe he'd show his hand to retrieve it?

Thanos already had an army, had the power to summon demonic spirits, of what use would he need the scepter?

Unless…

'The mortal spies within SHIELD…could they have made a deal with someone else?' Loki's brow furrowed, but now was not the time to think about this.

For once he had to focus on the problem right in front of him, instead of eight moves ahead.

Even if it cost him his sanity.

"At each location the Scepter is stored; they have hyper-sensitive magic signature detectors for you, Glow Stick. Don't use your magic too much unless the Op goes sideways. I doubt you were able to take more than a handful of those capsules from Tony's lab." Natasha stated and Loki scowled a bit, that would certainly make things a bit less fun. He couldn't promise anything, but he did only have four capsules left.

"I've never been one for self-restraint." Loki joked, but it was a thinly veiled warning.
Natasha shot him a simmering glare.

"Aside from that, Steve, nothing special, just thermal detection, laser grids, retinal scanning locks, electric shock panels, automatic turret guns, oxygen deprivation airlocks, a hundred guards, oh and it's about twenty floors underground." Natasha non-chalantly listed, packing another clip of extra ammunition for her gun. Rogers just shook his head. Jaken, now Jack, stood next to Loki looking up to him with a distrustful gaze.

"We should go over our different definitions of 'special'." Rogers smiled and Natasha smirked back.

None of this mattered to Loki.

"I've advised Asgard through worse." Loki reassured, looking mostly at Jaken. He knew the Water Demon disliked him, and he couldn't exactly disagree with why. However, he had more important things to deal with than what the Water Demon thought of him. He ran a hand through his hair.

It was dark, the sun had not yet risen, which gave them a small advantage.

Loki, suddenly invigorated, itched for this to be begin. Midgard's SHIELD, once a mere nuisance, now demanded his full devastating attention. These people who dared try to kill Clint and Sesshomaru. He would not fail in routing their organization if that is what it took to find who was responsible.

He saw soft brown eyes, a strong jaw, a cocky grin...if he was ever taken from the land of the living…

'No. Keep a lid on it. I cannot show my hand here. There will be a time where I will ruthlessly gut whoever is responsible for this, here is not the place.' Loki struggled to keep his magic low as he grumbled about how he was reduced to skulking about some gaudy tower.

"There are two entrances to get to the level we need to access. One is the elevator, the other is the back stairwell. They are both guarded with motion detecting laser grids. Once we get inside I'll disable the auxiliary power so we can take the elevator shaft down." Natasha explained as they began to circle around to a side entrance to the tower, avoiding the main courtyard entrance. This would be so much easier if he could just do it himself.

"This human city smells worse than the last one! Hurry up let's get out of here!" Jaken's mood mirrored Loki's.

"That's the plan Kermit." Natasha quipped, and they moved to a maintenance access door, only to find it already the door already ajar, lock disabled. Natasha didn't hesitate as she moved through it, palming her tazing discs. Well, at least the treacherous snakes were punctual.

"They're still here. Steve, time to go to work." Natasha announced. Loki allowed the glamour to part on the flowered parasol Rogers had been begrudgingly carrying. Rogers' eyes hardened at Loki, who just grinned as Rogers took his pink flower glamored shield.

Loki looked down at Jake. He had no weapon which would pose a problem.

He magicked one of his prized Uru daggers and coated the blade in Blitzen.

If he needed to draw serious arms, he could use his spear.

"Take this, use it wisely and don't screw this up." Loki hissed at Jaken. If he so much nicked
himself with that dagger he'd be dead.

He really didn't relish having to have that conversation with Sho.

"Well, it seems like someone's done a lot of the work for us." Rogers joked as they made their way into the dimly lit hall. Loki flicked his wrist and the hall lit up in a soft green light. Two bodies littered the hall, by the blood spatters they were dead, but haven't been for long. The four of them strode ahead unaffected, though Rogers' face was grim.

The hall turned into a narrow spiral stairwell and as they made their way down the spiraling stairwell they heard soft cursing. Loki magicked his daggers. He could begin to feel the tingle of another magic source.

Natasha put her hand up to hold their position as Rogers lifted his shield. Loki pointed down the stairwell and wrote the number six in the air in faintly glowing magic.

Rogers, with precision Clint would be proud of, slung his shield down the stairwell, hitting one man, only to have the shield bounce and hit the other and fling back up. Natasha propelled herself down over the bannister, twisting catching the next railing down, deftly flipping and with a spinning bird kick, worked her legs into a split and kicked the two guards in the head, tazing them shortly after.

Loki spelled Jaken's mouth shut and tossed him down, Natasha caught him by his tunic. Loki and Rogers vaulted over the railing and with a few flicks of his own single dagger the last two were dealt with a bit more permanently than the previous four.

Natasha scoffed and Rogers shot him a dark look at Loki. Loki rolled his eyes. If they had thought he would be doing this without killing a few disloyal mortals they thought wrong.

Jaken struggled to say something. They continued onward.

They spiral staircase descended down into a hall with an elevator, the doors already opened and ropes already dangling down. Loki suspected the six people they just surprised were perhaps going surface level to ready their escape.

He sensed the scepter. It was dauntingly, hauntingly, delectably close. Loki heard its whispers, but no. Those had to only be in his head. No one else had mentioned hearing anything.

"We can use their equipment to repel down the elevator shaft." Natasha jerked the nylon rope, and located her carabiner and harness. Loki was not about to repel down. Jaken also looked uneasily down.

"Natasha, don't you think this has all been a little too easy?" Rogers stated. "I mean you said there were hundreds of guards, the security…."

"All this means is that they either managed to take all of it out. Unlikely. Someone who works here managed to be some of the spies, somewhat likely. More likely… this goes high up and they disabled the security protocols. Nothing has been hacked, it was all turned off from high up." Natasha whispered, not liking it either.

Loki gazed down the elevator shaft, there was a small bit of light at the very bottom, his eyes could catch it. He took one of the youki capsules and threw it down the elevator shaft. At the very bottom, which had to be twenty floors down, the capsule burst open and in a flash he teleported them all down.
"Show off." Rogers sighed Loki smirked but the smirk died when they looked out into the smoking, bloody hallway. SHIELD agents littered the hall, all slaughtered. The linoleum floor had scorch marks, pools of blood, but what was most curious were the large holes scorched through some of the agents' chests. The revolting smell of burnt flesh and hair clogged the hall like a miasma. Loki thinned his lips, the stench coming off the corpses smelled familiar.

The wounds did as well.

Jaken waddled out into the carnage completely unaffected.

"My Lord awaits my return! Hurry up humans!" Jaken scuttled around the blood and Loki couldn't help but laugh through his nose, Jaken may not look like much, but squeamish he was not. Natasha, not to be outdone squatted down to look at the cantaloupe sized hole in one of the agent's chests.

"That is not the Chitauri's magic, of that I can assure you." Loki explained, now standing next to her. Rogers went ahead, presumably to keep Jaken within sight. Loki's mouth went a little dry at the thought of anything happening to the retainer. Sesshomaru may level the city.

At least he made for a small target, being only a foot and a half tall.

"It's not any SHIELD weapon or tech I know of." Natasha pursed her lips, standing looking into Loki's eyes with an unreadable, hard glare with her glamored eyes. "You better not waste those youki bombs you have; this could get ugly." Natasha advised and Loki almost responded before he heard something.

A thread pulled at his mind.

'Broken blade…' Loki snapped his head left and right quickly. He heard it that time. The scepter. It was somewhere nearby. Loki could have sworn Natasha said something but he didn't listen. He had to get to Jaken. Quickly. He stormed up the hallway, hand white knuckling his lone dagger, already wishing he had the second. Again, Natasha said something, but he couldn't hear her.

"Yes…yes I am here forger…" He found himself murmuring. He had to find the scepter. No. Jaken. Yes, he had to find Jaken. Not the scepter. Where were they? Loki increased his speed. Was he running now? Maybe. He heard voices again now. From where?

'Come back, the power you seek is here. Come back, my Broken Blade, we have work to do.' He heard it now! Yes! Loki's mouth split into a sickle of a smile, his eyes lit up in hunger. The call of power! His power! He could almost taste its metallic tang! The blue fragments in Loki's eyes, unbeknownst to him to him, began to cluster together.

"I see you're going to do things the hard way!" Loki burst through a door, hearing Rogers' voice. It had to be the right door. He could hear the scepter behind it. Loki's mind began to harden and smooth, the rough crevices where memories and faces were stored began to erode. Loki found the containment room. The room. The scepter. It was in that mortal's hands.

It was so close, and it called to him. It wanted him! He was uniquely chosen! The only fate that made sense anymore. The scepter. The power. He could belong. The tempting, thirsty draw of respect, fear, dried Loki's mouth.

Loki fell to the ground, a sharp jolt stabbing him in the back. He looked back, eyes wild, lips curled in a snarl.

"Snap out of it!" He squinted at the vaguely familiar woman, holding a crackling baton. What? Snap out of what?
"Keep back mortal. You cannot prevent me from my destiny! It calls to me! I was chosen! Your envy is repugnant!" Loki then heard pops. Gunshots. Loki blipped up a force field, counting the mortals in the room. forty-one mortals, two groups. The smaller group had the scepter, however they had larger guns. Bedclothes, yes, that was his name, now engaged both parties. Oh yes, and Jaken the Water Demon.

Jaken. That name….who was he? Oh yes of course, Sesshomaru's Retainer, he couldn't let anyone harm him. He had to get the scepter after all. He had to protect Midgard.

He had to rule Midgard.

A glimpse of Clint, complete with bedhead and wearing a yellow Kobe Bryant shirt came to his memory, a cherished one.

'No.' Loki paled. The scepter! Clint! he had to resist! He frantically turned to Natasha, eyes pleading. He couldn't find words but she knew what was going on. He had to keep himself together. He couldn't use his magic, if his magic hit the scepter it would act as an instant conduit. He couldn't get any closer, could he?

Loki gritted his teeth and withdrew his dagger and summoned his spear, hurling it at the nearest assailant threatening Rogers, impaling him in the back lethally. He called the spear back. He could do this much. The fight came through as pictures in a slide show. Biting bits of pain pricked his body, but he couldn't really feel them.

Rogers, like a Roman gladiator, took out at least five men in a short combination of mixed martial arts prowess. He dipped, threw out a heavily muscled elbow, then flipped over another agent, disarming him and hitting him in the head with his own gun. Loki was reminded of Thor, of a memory, a fragment of a battle long ago.

'Broken blade, why are you resisting? Isn't it easier to submit? What use are you to anyone else? That Demon I saw wandering on the Astral Plane? Sounga will be mine. The Soul Gem will be whole, you and your Demon friend will be mine, and our army will know no bounds.' The scepter wanted Sho too? What did he mean wandering on the Astral Plane? Seers can only see the Astral Plane not walk it. Wait. His mother, Frigga said the same in Asgard. That Sesshomaru had been wandering the Astral Plane.

Maybe Sho and he could rule Midgard together. No. Sho wouldn't want to.

'He could be convinced, he is not without reason.' Didn't Thor say that? Where? On the battlefield? No in a tower. In a kitchen. Pancakes.

None of this made any sense! What was he doing here?!

Loki threw his spear again, catching a mortal in the chest, almost grazing Jaken. Jaken yelped, his youki level rising slightly. Loki's mind cleared a little.

"Lord Sesshomaru?" Jaken piped up. 'Is the Demon going insane? Sesshomaru is not here. He abandoned me when I came back from Alfheim!' Anger bloomed in Loki's chest, his black magic began to coil on the floor.

Of course, Sesshomaru wasn't here. Thor wasn't either. They weren't there when he really needed them. He changed the grip on his grand Uru spear and lunged forward and slashed, killing two more. The blood splattered a vivid scarlet. He could do this all day. He twirled his spear, flinging blood from its blade as his eyes laser locked on the scepter.
That welcoming hum of magic. He could get ultimate power now! He could become indomitable; he could have a destiny all of his own! He could be grand!

"Kermit! We need you—" Natasha shouted. Rogers and her fighting the other two groups of mortals, the one with the scepter in the back corner of the room, eyes blue and cackling. What a strange coincidence, he was cackling too! "Stay there, take cover. We need to take more of these guys out." That woman sounded almost anxious?

She should be.

'All I have to do was just kill all these mortals. Simple. Fun even! Oh. This will be great, such a fantastic feeling!' Loki rolled his head on his neck then gnashed his teeth.

Loki then doubled over in laughter. He spliced and copied himself, three more of him appearing around the room, all laughing, all gleaming in mottled black and green magic.

A bullet clipped his shoulder, but what did he care?! Pain didn't matter anymore! The scepter! The scepter is what mattered! Loki continued to laugh, he hugged his sides and his black magic seeped out like tar.

His copies all fuzzed, short circuited and faded away.

Suddenly, the figure in the corner of the room fired the scepter at Loki. The blast hit him straight in the chest and everything suddenly fell into place for him. His forger, he was needed! Someone needed him for his might! Someone wanted his gifts, his skills, and not just for another's destiny! The Other would allow him his own! With Sho! Loki's mind flooded in joy, riding a colossal high. Another bullet bit into him somewhere on his body, but it honestly didn't matter!

"Yes, Forger! I have arrived, your Broken Blade! I'll display for you my full and splendid potential! I have gotten so much stronger! I have a mighty need, an unquenchable thirst! You shall have your realm, your Asgard, and I shall have mine, my Midgard!" Loki shouted cheeks hurting he was smiling so hard. He couldn't wait! He puffed his chest out and arms flung out to his sides, holding his spear point out like a challenge.

'Loki, is that an earnest request?' He recognized that voice, why was he thinking this now? Warm brown eyes and his smile on a bed.

Natasha whipped to face him, her glamored-dark eyes hard, skin pallid. She made a move for her gun. Let her shoot him! It wouldn't stop him! Loki sauntered forth, twirling his spear lazily. With arms like whips, he sliced into an approaching agent like a hot knife through butter.

He hummed a tune, a Midgardian one: 'harder, better, faster, stronger'. The blood sprayed, just like his did in his cell on The Relentless all that time ago. The prize was worth the pain!

He spliced and copied himself again, then retracted the copies almost instantly. Then spliced again, this time there were ten of him! Ten! All smiling and laughing with him!

"Such an opportune time for a such a decadent war!" All the Lokis chorused in unison. His mind began to wash over in blue, his mouth twisted in a nefarious smile. The blue magic spread and washed over his black magic. The call of the scepter sounded so much more luxurious than last time!

"Natasha, we need to get that scepter to Jaken now. Loki is losing it! He is becoming just like was three years ago." Loki heard Rogers' desperation and fired a magic bolt at him. It ricocheted off his flowered shield, hitting an agent in the chest. That will teach him from speaking about him as if he
wasn't in the room. Loki, distracted, didn't notice Jaken come upon him, dagger drawn.

What was this weak, little Demon up to?!

"Gods! Such trouble you are! Stop replicating and babbling your nonsense and help me honor my Lord!" Jaken quickly slashed open Loki's pocket with his dagger and the three youki capsules spilled out. How had he gotten so close? Loki jerked his spear back in a reverse style, prepared to eviscerate the little Demon. How dare he take his things?!

Jaken scrambled to pick up one of the capsules and threw it on the floor. Instantly the room filled with a soft blue shimmering youki, scaring away the black, sparkling coils of Loki's magic into navy blue smoke.

The man in the corner stopped cackling, instead now straining to hear something. Loki stopped his spear blow just short of Jaken's glamored face. His green eyes, flecked visibly with blue, shot wide. Loki's mind carved out again, the mission.

Clint. The invasion. The Other. Loki almost dropped his spear. He had been close. Too close.

"Jaken, get over here now!" Rogers ordered, Jaken crossed his arms indignantly, as if to reply he was not to be ordered about by the likes of him.

Loki scanned the room, he recognized the guns some of the agents had. They looked just like the weapon Agent Coulson had almost fired on him in the helicarrier. Did the mortals manage to forge more weapons made from the Destroyer he had sent after Thor? Was that the fate the agents in the hall met? Loki knew that the shimmering youki in the room would not last.

Loki picked up an angry Jaken.

"Corner pocket, Rogers." Loki bit out a bit of humor, if only to signal to them that he wasn't…who or whatever that just was. He tossed Jaken like a sack to Rogers who jumped in the air, catching the foot and a half tall squawking demon.

Loki wasted no more time and struck and killed the remaining agents, Natasha tucked into a roll only to spring up, feet first, with her electrified batons in a nimble flip, electrocuting three agents to the ground in a surprising display of gymnastics.

Loki threw up a force field just in time to shield Natasha from a shot from the Destroyer gun. Expertly, she then used her wire to disarm the offending agent and subdue him with a wire strangulation maneuver.

Loki just noticed the walls of the room had craters, bullet holes and scorch marks all in them. Those hadn't been there before, how did he not notice that? Natasha bled from her left arm, right hip, and brow. She favored her right leg too much. Rogers's suit was torn open, a deep gash of some sort marred his back and soot and sweat marked his brow and he was bleeding from his mouth. How long had they been fighting in this room? How many mortals here were dead or dying?

The shimmering youki began to fade, and Loki heard the whisper. It still wanted him, even after all this time. How disturbing and comforting at the same time….

No. Someone else here wanted him. Clint. He bent down and picked up the remaining two youki capsules.

"Almost there!" Loki heard Rogers fling his shield out knocking the scepter from the agent's hands.
and the shield bounced back to him, slamming the shield into the agent's head to render him out of the scepter's control. Rogers put Jaken down and he darted to pick up the scepter.

Loki's face split into another severe frown as he powered up a large magic bolt. He was not going to let that Demon get away with his scepter. It belonged to him, his forger gave it to him as a gift, not this Water Demon!

"Aha! Lord Sesshomaru are you pleased?! Jaken your most loyal servant has procured a most powerful weapon!" Jaken waved the scepter in the air with one hand, his staff with the other. The blue glow of the scepter immediately dimmed to nothing. Loki powered down his hand.

His mind cleared. He started to breathe. Had he not been breathing this whole time? No, he had to have been. Sweet, fresh air filled his lungs and he ran his bloody fingers through his sweaty hair, when had he dropped his spear? He spotted it on the floor and magicked it away. His body stung with oddly positioned bullet holes. His right shoulder was burnt and the skin beneath his armor was charred and blackened, but not too bloody. His hands shook violently, he needed to calm his heart rate.

Had he almost gotten hit by the Destroyer gun again?

"...Glow stick, what's your status?" Natasha squared her shoulders to him. She was close, her eyes opened him up. He had to convince them, really convince them he was fine. Because he was.

"As SHIELD would put it, uncompromised. I've never been better. Let us be off." Loki thinned his lips, sighing through his nose. Rogers looked his way, looking fifty percent convinced. Loki was about to teleport them back to the tower when he realized things were off. The scepter...the scepter shouldn't have called to him so strongly....unless. Loki looked up at the ceiling.

The scepter wouldn't have called so strongly unless the Chitauri were here.

"What is it Loki?" Rogers asked, voice drained. Loki put a finger up. He had to deal with this himself.

He closed his eyes, he stopped his teleportation magic and palmed the youki capsule. Instead, he magicked his spear. He spiked the last youki capsule on the ground and with a pulse of blooming green magic he healed his comrades' wounds, and his own.

"We have company. Remain here." Loki ordered and in a flash he was on the sidewalk of Shanghai in the throes of dawn. A hazy yellow sun filtered its rays across the glittering Bund of Shanghai, interrupted only by a dark, petrifying shape stalling in the sky above the Oriental Pearl Tower. People all around him stood, chattering to themselves about how now the aliens had now come for them.

The long, sharp angled bottom of the Aethon stretched out across the city, managing to shadow it even with the sun at a low angle. It was a sight. The matte black ship had tracks of glowing violet streaking across it. The Mad Titans' insignia emblazoned on the stern stabilizer fin glowed as the engines output a silent, sinister stall above the city.

Nothing on Midgard matched it.

It loomed like a foot above an anthill. Hadn't he said something similar to that effect before?

A viscous, dark, frenzy surged in him. They had almost had him; they had almost captured him again! They almost had him kill Natasha, Rogers, and Jaken. Inexcusable. He had to show them. He was no longer their little pawn, their pitiful chess piece.
Another image of Clint flashed in his mind, wet and so beautiful in his shower, writing diva on his chest with suds. His heart clenched at his grin, if he could keep him grinning…

Stealth mission be damned. He would defeat them now. He charged up his uru spear, it shown dark and dramatic with thorns of black magic entwined it. His magic amplified into large, fuming petals that unfurled around him, reverberating and undulating slowly.

Loki's eyes, now green flecked with blue, narrowed into slits. He pointed his spear high into the air as the first of the Chitauri chariots flew from the vessel. So, that's how they wanted to play this. He heard people scream and flee, panicked chaos from their beloved tower.

This is where he would make his stand. He magicked his glamour away.

"How marvelous for you to swing by, but I'll have to show you the door." Loki twirled his spear above his head like a helicopter blade and with a definitive thud, slammed the uru spear onto the cement. Countless thorns of black magic shot out of the spearhead, stabbing through the chariots, exploding them in a flashy display of power.

"You see." Loki continued. "I have quite a nice abode here in Midgard, all the lime sherbet and entertainment I could possibly ask for. So please, if you wish to come over uninvited, please do know I will escort you from the premises. You are quite unwelcome." Loki couldn't help himself. He never had the chance, the luxury to tell them to fuck off. To prove to them he was most certainly not going back to being their weapon, but one used against them.

"We are prepared for whatever you have in store!" Loki shouted. The black petals all around him expanded upwards. Not unlike the poisonous oleander flower, the petals sliced out, smoking and dark against the dawn sky as more chariots swarmed out like cicadas.

Gunfire from the Chitauri began to rain down and much to Loki's surprise, some burned through his magic shields. Loki scowled, they must have studied his magic. Too bad for them he was stronger now. He mended most of the holes in his shields to prevent more bolts from raining down on the large city.

With another ornate flourish of a spear he shot more sparkling black thorns of magic at the chariots, the black, oleander like petals shielding the ground below while his spikes of black magic skewered the chariots.

He knew he would win out. He just had to envelope the massive Aethon in his magic. He ratcheted up his magic, the black energy around his spear arced up like giant branches and struck the underside of the Aethon.

Only the black magic branches rebounded off a supremely powerful shield.

The spaceship lurched, but remained unharmed. They indeed had studied his magic to produce a shield like that.

"You have the gall to protect yourself with my own magic?! It won't work. I'll unweave your defenses!" Loki taunted. He would need to draw on more power. Yggdrasil!

Maybe he could taunt the captain of the Aethon out of the ship before they powered up the main artillery.

Just why hadn't they powered up the main cannon?

It was then he saw a special chariot take advantage of his tactical choice and navigate down
through a hole that had burnt through one of his petals. He saw the blue figure jump off the chariot high in the sky, graceful like Sesshomaru. With a dexterous flip, the woman landed in front of him, leaving a small crater in the cement.

The blue figure rose, she had eyes as black as pitch and cybernetic accoutrements adorned her body. She had an expression on her face that could make the devil fear her shadow. A Luphomoid, some sort of cybernetic one. She held out two batons, they surged with an otherworldly electricity that felt much different than Thor's Mjolnir could summon, or Natasha's batons could output.

"You." She pointed the weapon at Loki. "Godling. Talk too much. I, Nebula, am in no mood to listen to your fantasies over destroying my father. I didn't expect to run into you here but all the better for me. You can come willingly, or I can cripple you, then deliver you." Loki laughed haughtily. So, was one of many Thanos' kidnapped and enhanced daughters.

'A daughter of Thanos doesn't usually mince words, and usually fights to the death. Thanos has plans for me if she is willing to merely capture me, that is certain.' Loki's eyes lit up with a fierce green energy.

"Oh, I would like to see you try." Loki's spear glowed with black magic and he lunged at her. She immediately coupled her batons together to make a long electroactive staff and the two weapons clashed, sending shockwaves of lightning and magic outwards. Loki's pulse jack up, she was strong, much stronger than a Luphomoid should be. And fast. She was skilled. Her movements reminded him of a blend of Natasha's and Sho's of which he was thankful. This being, he could fight while keeping his black magic up on the Aethon.

"I don't fail Godling. We will retrieve the scepter, orders are orders and I don't fail. And once we capture you here, we will take back our scepter and destroy your pathetic friends down in that bunker. I'll revel in watching their last nerve endings twitch like you will once the Other has your mind open again!" Nebula feinted left and struck out with her staff right, Loki parried the blow cleanly with his spear.

'We? Who is we? Is she referring to the Chitauri?' Loki eyes widened in realization. 'No.'

They continued to swoop and strike at each other, his sparkling black magic against her blue lightning. His thrusts and dips of a razor-sharp spear point versus the hard, blunt, bone-crunching end of her staff. Nebula's face never betrayed any hint of emotion except sheer determination. He knew, as well as she did, the price of failure against Thanos.

'It is precisely why Thanos wants me back, so he can personally torture me, displaying the horrors that failure reaped. I won't allow that to happen. But Nebula thinks the exact same thing could happen to her if she were to come back empty handed…well the same may await her. Thanos and the Other care not for devotion, only for compliance out of fear.' Loki spun away from her staff, dipping low in a perfect misdirection only to rise up behind her.

Loki managed to crack Nebula cross the head with the butt of his spear, but she simply managed to heal almost instantly. Her body composition reminded him of Rogers in way, altered and far more powerful than they were meant to be.

"Hmph, even a novice could have seen that attack coming. I still don't see why I can't just kill him. What's so special about him, and this wand anyway? It's all child's play. Boring child's play." Loki heard a voice. It resounded in his head, and he knew it was only due to Allspeak and his magic he could hear it.

There was a Demonic Spirit here. The blood in Loki veins hardened to granite. He had coated all
the Blitzen he had left on the dagger Jaken now possessed.

"Can it, runt!" Nebula shouted to the spirit to her right. "You're not as pathetic as I thought, Godling. But be assured, you with your little Terran friends, the Canine Demon, and the Thunder God are not strong enough to defeat Thanos. He will crush you and this pitiful planet." Nebula smiled smugly, now examining Loki like a spider would a fly.

"Your meat-headed father better remember that I get Sesshomaru's body after he is done with him." The voice echoed again in his mind. It sounded sinister and it definitely knew Sesshomaru. If that spirit decided to take up arms against him there wouldn't be much he could do to stop him. If anything, the spirit could slice through them all with no resistance.

'Perhaps the spirits have given Thanos vital information on Sesshomaru on top of what the spies and the Other have gleaned. The Other's voice in the scepter claimed he saw Sesshomaru on the Astral Plane, confirming what Frigga had told me. If the Other had seen him on the Astral Plane it does not bode well.' They both spun and Loki brought out his arm fully parallel to the ground. His spear held horizontal behind his back, shading his arm, hand choked up on the spear joint as he prepared another intricate attack.

"That really shouldn't be a concern of yours, should it?" Loki challenged and Nebula struck first, aggressive and sure. She had long perfected the art of jo-kata and if she were anyone else Loki would have nodded at her technique in approval. With a honed strength she spun the lightning charged staff around her in vertical wheels of blue and Loki barely managed to parry it down before sniping her with a magic bolt, sending her skidding backwards.

Loki took advantage of the slight delay and his black magic far above them began to fully blossom. Loki multi-tasked fighting the assassin in front of him and ensnaring the Aethon fully within his black magic. Nebula's face darkened and her obsidian gaze could challenge Odin's any day.

This had taken long enough. It was just past dawn now. His magic shields would not prevent the other chariots from raining down upon the city for much longer.

"Ok, Loki, you and the dramatic exits have got to stop." Loki heard the familiar commanding voice of Rogers. Loki flashed a coy smile, Jaken had the scepter firmly in his little green hands, blue crystal inert. He was not merely holding it by choice however. Natasha had tied the scepter to Jaken's back using her wire she had used to disarm that one agent.

It didn't look like she was taking any chances.

"Oh, so you delivered the scepter to me instead of escaping. How opportune, you naïve, blundering idiots!" Nebula leapt over Loki and threw her staff like a javelin at feet of Jaken. Rogers darted in front, taking the blow with his shield and it reverberated off at an odd angle, lightning striking out all around them, quite unlike anything Thor would produce.

The lightning burst out in all directions, redirecting and ricocheting and Natasha used her baton as a ground. She certainly knew what she was doing.

"Steve, you're up, I have to babysit Kermit here." Rogers nodded and engaged Nebula, and the look on his face when she blocked one of his punches with her forearm and tilted her head side to side tauntingly almost made Loki snort.

"Who is this Kermit?! I my name is Jaken, you vile woman!" Jaken dodged a blow from Natasha. The dagger he had given Jaken was still held by Jaken, the magic poison had thoroughly absorbed into its blade.
'You look familiar little Demon... Ah. That's right, you're that weak imp that followed Sesshomaru around. Just where is he? Maybe this boring show will turn interesting.' Loki heard the voice again.

"Aahhh! What are you doing here?! You reek of Naraku! You must be one of his incarnations, no in fact I know I recognize you." Jaken exclaimed, pointing some distance in front of him.

"Kermit who are you talking to?!" Natasha asked and before Loki could respond for him Nebula struck out with a quick crescent kick to bring her heel down on his ear but he evaded it with a fighter's grace. Her black eyes narrowed. Loki used this opportunity to finish enveloping the underside of the Aethon in his magic. If he could not destroy it with his magic, he could contain it until reinforcements could.

He could prevent the wreckage from falling upon the city when they destroyed the Aethon, he certainly wouldn't let it escape.

Rogers threw his shield once more, narrowly clipping Nebula.

"Not bad for a Terran. But you're still miserably underprepared for Thanos' fleet." Nebula bounded backwards in a handspring, picking up her staff while in a handstand and with a glowing blue arc brought it down on the ground in front of her, lightning webbing out.

"Hakudoshi is here! We never fought him directly, but we fought a creation of his which destroyed Tokijin, my Lord's previous sword." Jaken informed and Natasha sharpened her gaze ahead of her.

"A demonic spirit of some kind is here, I can assure you. I can hear his voice in my head." Loki admitted, straining to fully ensconce the Aethon and snipe Chitauri that had ruptured through his shield again.

"You can hear me, Magician? The Other calls you 'Broken Blade'; says that you're special. I don't see what's so special about you. I bet you bleed red, just like everything else." Loki fought panic, this battle would be far easier if he didn't have to worry about the Aethon and the Chitauri.

It was at that time Natasha picked up one of the destroyer guns she must have brought up with her and shot it straight at a shocked Nebula.

The overpowered shot refracted off an invisible barrier. It had to be the spirit's barrier.

"Clumsy Nebula. Kagura never let a human that stupid to shoot her. I'm bored, my turn." Hakudoshi chastised. Loki didn't have time to register what that could mean before a spiking, arc of blistering pain impaled him.

Loki choked on his own blood, gurgling and gasping as he wide-eyed looked down at his invisible foe. He swiped his own spear out but caught nothing but air.

"Loki!" He heard a shout. Natasha?

His blood oozed down what seemed to be a spear, or pole arm. Loki stabbed out this time with verdant green magic vines plunging forward.

Nothing.

"You tiny brat, don't kill him. The Other needs him alive and I will not receive punishment for your slaked bloodlust if you kill him here!" Nebula hissed, dodging another destroyer blast with a deft jump. The invisible weapon was twisted and pulled out ever so slowly only for it to be again sliced deep across his chest. The stench of his own blood filled his nostrils, and the stinging, ripping pain
caught Loki off guard.

His sticky blood oozed through his fingers as he reflexively pressed against his chest.

He thought he'd be used to pain by now, but this all seemed so fresh, so visceral. Maybe, he wasn't as dead inside as he thought previously. He had been at peace for a while with Clint hadn't he? He felt more alive in Stark's garish tower than he had in centuries.

Maybe that was why a mere stab and slash caused such visceral, choking torment.

Loki's spine buckled and he doubled over but he refused to kneel. He heavily leaned on his spear as a clutch and forced his up gaze from the blood stained cement. Bullets flew past him at their invisible foe, as well as Rogers' shield but they struck nothing.

"What happens to you, Nebula, is on you. It's tacky to blame others for your failures. As I see it, there is only one being who can kill me a second time, and he isn't here, so I'll have a little fun." Hakudoshi's voice sounded impossibly close, like he was breathing in Loki's ear. This Demon sounded exactly like someone Thanos would think he would like in his ranks, but soon realize it was a mistake. Loki had worked with his kind before, and probably would have again if his life didn't take such a misfortunate turn with him on the Bifrost.

Another white-hot lance of pain exploded through his back, cracking a rib or two as the invisible weapon impaled him once more. His blood dripped down to the cement freely. Loki's glimmering black flowering shield faltered, some Chitauri chariots began to pour through the gaps and Loki grimaced and turned towards Jaken.

He instantly copied himself and teleported. He smirked when he saw his copy get skewered through again.

"Crafty trick." The spirit almost sounded amused.

Blitzen. He needed his dagger back.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Nebula engage Rogers once more.

"Dagger. Now." Loki hissed out, becoming visible.

'Oh, you think your cowards' weapon will strike me when your spear cannot?' Hakudoshi taunted. What a pest. He saw Jaken wind up and throw the dagger.

What a terrible throw. But Natasha now had her hands busy with the Chitauri that had escaped his defenses. If he could not make a proper stand here, what use could he be once the Nycteus, Worldslayer, The Relenentless, The Voracious, and even The Umbra finally came?

Loki lifted his head, eyes burning a jet-black ire.

He saw his prized uru dagger, with its shining blade blue from absorbing Blitzen. The same dagger he had almost sacrificed Sho's life to craft. It zipped through the air he knew the spirit had to inhabit. Blitzen would work! He would be able to wound this spirit!

Pause.

The poisoned dagger clattered onto the cement to his right.

Nothing.
'Oh, you thought…you actually thought you could harm me? A spirit with no ties to the physical realm? Didn't that old, weak, Dragon Demon teach you lot anything? Only Sesshomaru can send us back. And your faithful dog isn't here, is he? Pfft that aloof canine couldn't even best my Moyomaru, do you truly think you can defeat the onslaught to come? You are all good as viscera. Sit back and watch as I turn these humans to ribbon and take that stupid magic wand for my infinitely ham-fisted allies.' Hakudoshi's voice almost sounded frustrated, which struck Loki as odd. Loki staggered to a standing stance. He wanted to say the Demon sounded cocky, but really, this was confidence.

His poison, Blitzen, was useless.

Or….was it?

"AHHH! Stay back spawn of Naraku! Lord Sesshomaru help me!" Loki heard Jaken, but instead of listening intently, he was distracted. Something, deep in his memory was pulled forward by the spirits provocation. Dragon. A Dragon. The Uru Dragon. The Uru ate the Uru stone and embodied the Uru itself.

If he….if he did the same with his magic….could he do the same?

Yggdrasil was not of Midgard's physical realm…it only existed in the spiritual realm

'Yggdrasil…If you have any leaf of faith in me. Aid me. Support my triumph. Midgard depends on it. Lend me a branch, a flower, a twig. ANYTHING!' Loki grabbed his dagger from the cement. He gritted his teeth and continued to try to prevent the chitauri’s and the Aethon's attacks with his weakening magic.

He was no nurse.

He was no savior.

He was a weapon.

He raked his exceptionally fine dagger across his neck, spilling more of his blood all around him. It reminded him of the cell the Other kept him in, arcs and pools of viscous blood. But that was in the past. The poison he himself created coursed through his circulatory system, ravaging every capillary in his body.

"Loki have you gone mad?!" He heard Natasha accuse. Loki gauged where this 'Hakudoshi' was through Jaken's fear-frozen gaze and summoned a spell he hadn't used in a long time.

"You arrogant, trivial, wastes of time! You are not worthy of judging me! I am LOKI! LOKI GOD OF CHAOS AND YOU WILL RECOGNISE MY POWER." Loki's eyes flooded black and he fisted his blood soaked left hand. All around him black gumtree seed pods shot out in the trajectory he knew that sniveling spirit occupied. It was similar to the spell he used against Sesshomaru, only this time inside each one was some of his own blood.

He usually avoided bloodspells, but this was an exception.

The gumtree pods burst in mists of blood and spikes of sparkling black magic.

"Ack!" Loki's face flourished into a bright smile. It actually worked. For once fortune favored him!

The spirit began to slowly become visible, he had injured his shoulder, gut, and leg with his gumtree bombs.
He was short, and mostly clad in white with long white hair. He turned, he was a boy, no older than Rin, holding a bloody naginata. He gazed back, looking rather puzzled. Loki straightened smugly, even though he had put a hand to his neck to help heal his gushing wound.

"Blast! I knew that cocky, scarlet skinned Demon was wrong about you all being invincible." Nebula announced and Loki fought the jolts of pain and brain foggiest brought on by blood loss to process what she said.

He was right. There were more of these Demon spirits, and there was at least one other Demon alive summoning them.

"Invincible? Everyone I know who thought themselves invincible are now bones and dust." The dead look in Hakudoshi's eyes when he turned to face him would have chilled Loki if he were a lesser Demi-God. Just who was this juvenile Demon?

"What?! He is just a boy, no older than Rin!" Loki turned to Rogers who up until then had been in a fierce fight with Nebula. Nebula, not surprised in the least swung her staff against Rogers' shield which sent him skidding back.

"Watch who you call boy, infant. Loki, maybe you were worth playing with after all. But alas, the time has passed for that. My new allies have decided this…” Hakudoshi turned, leveling his naginata at him. Loki saw the boy's nose scrunch. "Hive of humans needs some humbling. Sounds fun. Nebula and I will annihilate this crawling mound of humans!" Hakudoshi smiled and readied his naginata.

"I concur. This world believes too much in second chances. Ready the pulse cannon! Fire all secondary artillery! We will strike this city and burn it to ashes, then collect the scepter from the frog!" Nebula ordered and Loki paled. The cannon pivoted from the bow of the Aethon. It was massive, and it started to glow a blackened violet with his own magic. It hummed in Loki's sluggish veins.

"Curse you both." Loki spat. They had actually enhanced their weaponry with his magic as well. Dozens of smaller cannons alongside the port and starboard of the Aethon glowed and fired.

Loki leaned heavily on his spear and urged his shields to block the cannon fire and the Chitauri chariots. He would hold on.

"Loki, we need to shut that cannon down now. There are no helicarriers in range to disable it." Natasha commanded. His own vision around the edges began to darken. He had to stay conscious; he was the only one he would stop the Aethon. But how long could he hold out? Could black magic shield this massive city from a cannon that large even if it didn't falter before it fired?

"The Aethon is equipped with a magic shield enhanced with my own magic. It won't be crippled easily." Loki had never been an optimist. This war would always have casualties. If the first blast went through his black Oleander petals, perhaps it would buy them enough time for Thor to assist.

Some places in the blossoming shield began to thin and weaken. Loki, coughed out more blood and urged every tendril of magic out of his body. His feet had spun black roots into the earth, searching for Yggdrasil's power.

If he found Yggdrasil and was able to utilize its power, maybe Clint would be proud of him.

"Quick, throw me into the river! My Lord has a plan!" Loki weakly turned to Jaken who was actually hopping up and down. Hakudoshi tilted his head and lunged at the Water Demon.
"Sesshomaru is here? Maybe if I slay you, toad, he will show his face." Hakudoshi lunged towards Jaken.

"Not so fast." Natasha, suddenly free from battling Chitauri and raised her Destroyer gun and fired it at the Demon Spirit. The shot hit his barrier and resulted in a sonic boom that knocked them both, and some Chitauri back.

Loki vision was dimming, but he had enough magic to levitate something as small as Jaken.

He hoped that whatever the Water Demon had planned was worth it. If anything maybe it would by them some time. Loki used the magic he had been using to heal himself to fling the small Demon a few hundred meters away into the polluted Huangpu river.

"Loki, look out!" Roger's warned, which was kind of him. Loki bit back a grunt of pain as two Chitauri managed to hit him square in his chest with their ray blasts. He smote them both with dark green magic bolts.

"Loki, you don't look so good, how you holding up?" Roger's actually sounded concerned. He heard more coming, surrounding him, Rogers and Natasha. Did his black shield break this much?

"Never better, now duck." Grimacing, Loki shifted his weight off his spear to spin it above his head sloppily and slam it down. Leaves of magic sliced out in all directions cutting the Chitauri down. Nebula blocked the leaves with her staff and Hakudoshi threw up his barrier once more.

"Losing your strength Godling? Don't worry this will all be over soon." Nebula taunted. They would soon be overwhelmed and the poison in his veins had slowed any regeneration in his magic reserves, as well as the healing properties of his own body.

"Loki, we need you to focus on the Aethon, leave the rest to us. Your magic is barely holding out as is!" Rogers this time sounded a hair commanding. Would he really be captured here? Had he miscalculated this badly? Perhaps if he allowed himself to be captured, he could get his revenge on the other easier.

How much would Clint really miss him? He'd soon see the truth, that he was a monster not worth his time, much less his smiles and laughter.

"Of that, I am aware, Bedclothes. In case you haven't realized they have enhanced all aspects of this ship with my own magic. I am pooling my magic reserves to overpower it, seeing as I can't counter my own magic." Loki hissed, but knew it was futile. He couldn't even fend off a lowly Luphomoid, a Demon child, and the weakest ship of Thanos' fleet.

The cannon on the Aethon, to Loki's horror, had almost reached full capacity. He heard off in the distance the roar of jets. No doubt the paltry defenses of this province.

Too little too late.

Loki body started to feel impossibly heavy, sweat and blood dripped down into his eyes.

Then, an impossibly high screech registered in Loki ears. He gritted his teeth as an instinctual response.

"What is that? Is that Jaken?" Loki heard Rogers while struggling to hold back Nebula with his shield. Loki squinted out towards the river.

What he saw caused him to grin.
A teal, translucent sea serpent complete with large yellow eyes curled up and out of the river. His sleek, armored hide glimmered in the sun and dorsal fin and his smaller fins around his jaw glowed a faint yellow.

Loki allowed a small smile, how ironic he'd be seen with a sea serpent when the mortals believed he fathered Jörmungandr a sea serpent.

"Yes indeed." Loki coughed, blood dribbled down his jaw but he couldn't care less. Jaken opened his mouth which was lined with thousands of small, ivory, sharp teeth. His mouth too began to glow a faint yellow along with his eyes.

"Well, will you look at that. Maybe that frog isn't so useless after all. Amusing!" Hakudoshi flashed a smile that reminded him of one of his own. Loki didn't trust this Demon child, he seemed to be toying with all of them despite claiming the opposite.

The pulse cannon hummed and abruptly fired a breathtakingly overwhelming surge of magic at the heart of the city. It instantly dissolved his flowering black shield and vaporized the top of the Pearl Tower.

The purple beam lit up everything in their vicinity with a violet glow.

"No!" Loki didn't have time to conjure anything! This would be the first city lost to Thanos!

"Go Kermit!" Natasha called in between shots at Hakudoshi and Loki turned his head to see three bright yellow streaks arc across the sky like tremendous comets.

All three struck the violet pulse cannon blast. Loki held his breath.

The magic cannon blast and the youki comets dissolved into an ashen grey shimmering dust.

"Hmm...he never showed this much backbone against Naraku. This makes things interesting." Hakudoshi murmured and slung his naginata over his shoulder. Bullets ripped through his body, only for his body to immediately regenerate. The statement caught Loki off guard. It almost sounded like the Demon Spirit wasn't merely impressed, but actually pleased with the outcome.

"Prep the cannon for a second volley. Take out the sea creature, he has the scepter!" Nebula ordered as Jaken's pointed mouth glowed yellow again and fired a single comet of youki at the Aethon.

Loki, leaning heavily on his spear, straightened up as the sun bright beam struck the top of the Aethon, avoiding his own shield underneath it. In a flurry of sparkling grey powder, the yellow comet disabled a large swath of the Aethon's bow shield.

Now. Now was the time to strike. He also couldn't let Jaken outshine him.

"Damn. Just what happened? That small blast shouldn't have taken out the bow's primary shield array!" Nebula shoved off Rogers roughly and bounded back towards her chariot.

Above, the Midgardian jets shrieked by, firing a payload of missiles at the Aethon, stinging its smooth, black surface.

"Nebula, I'd say The Other didn't calculate on youki and dark magic canceling each other out. A costly mistake… if this war was to be anything close to a fair fight. Fortunate for us, the
miscalculation won't amount to much." Hakudoshi's lip twitched up directed towards Nebula. Loki pursed his lips, Hakudoshi was slowly beginning to fade back to transparency, the poison in his system was fading.

"Natasha keep them busy." Loki strained voice, reluctant to him, sounded more like a plea. She nodded, took out a Chitari with a destroyer blast and pilfered his chariot. He could count on her.

He had to act with haste. The trick he used against Hakudoshi earlier only worked because the poison was fresh in his blood stream and could mix with his magic easily, he couldn't repeat it. Loki closed off all his senses, focusing deep, digging deep. He had to focus everything he had on accessing the full depth of his magic reserves.

He heard the clamor of fighting all around him but instead he enveloped himself deep in a magic shell.

He pushed away the throbbing, hot pain of his injuries, he had sustained far worse. He ignored the doubts in his mind, he could do this. He had trained for this, this was the time to stand firm and rebuff their foe and show them all what savagery he was capable of.

Clint. He had to show Clint what he would do. He had to protect him, and show that he could. He wasn't just some off-kilter lunatic who lost his sanity and self control at the slightest provocation.

'Yggdrasil. You chose me as a vessel, allow me to be of use. Allow me to dispense of the threat that yearns to decimate your prized earth. Allow me to show them your wrath, through my own hatred.' Loki magic cycled through him like loops and streaks of green and black flashes.

Suddenly, his body overheated in an almost boiling, thrashing heat as if his blood itself had become solar rays.

He screamed and his muscles seized, his prized spear fell by the wayside. It was worth it.

A euphoric surge of magic ignited his mind like kindling. He became a physical wick for whatever his emotions, his passions deemed vital.

The tactile satisfaction of palming the Other's severed head in his hands illuminated every nerve ending. The thirst quenching pleasure of scratching his fingernails down Clint's toned back sparked deep in his chest.

Loki cackled lowly, then roared.

"Look upon me and despair!" Loki's throat felt like sandpaper, but it didn't stop the blood curdling bellow from echoing between the buildings.

A massive, sprawling thicket of stems, leaves, and oleander buds unfurled and sprung skyward toward the Aethon. The branches dug and the leaves and petals lacerated through the opening in the Aethon's shield. One petal managed to just nick the pulse cannon, sending sparks and tongues of flame spitting out of the barrel.

Loki was still panting, black magic still smoked out of his eyes, fingertips and the corners of his savage smile.

The Aethon's engines powered up with a guttural thrum. Their thrusters output blew his sweaty, damp hair into his face. Loki's smile faltered.

"All graph, initiate a tactical retreat. We're falling back to point Greyfield!" Nebula, a few scant
yards away from him shouted out.

All around him were smoking craters, some skyscrapers had taken hits as well. It was then Loki realized that the Aethon had peppered the surrounding area with its secondary cannons. His pupils constricted. Had Natasha or that naïve Captain been hit? Had he really allowed his black magic to ensconce his senses so badly? Since when had he fallen from someone who rarely let a single facial twitch slip by him, to being completely oblivious of cannon fire?!

He saw Natasha and Rogers, relatively unharmed. Ok, so he hadn't had missed too much.

"Jaken!" He heard Rogers yell. He whipped his head around to see that Jaken had a few bleeding wounds on his long, sleek frame but nothing that looked too bad. He was still upright and swaying from side to side in the polluted river, charging another yellow blast.

Loki gritted his teeth and willed to stand up straight, against the rhythmic biting pain jolting through his body. He tried to raise both arms but failed to raise his right. Apparently, he had been hit by some form of glancing blow from a cannon blast because his right hip now smoked. His skin charred black just like his shoulder and the acrid stench of his burned flesh stung his nose.

He had a few too many stab and slash wounds, one self-inflicted, to be in top fighting shape but that could not deter him. Suddenly a hand came down on his injured right shoulder and squeezed tight. Sort of. The being, half transparent slid right up beside him, violet, dull eyes peering into his.

Then a blade, an already sullied blade, raised to his already mangled throat.

"I could maim you here, possibly even kill you once I purge this poison." Hakudoshi whispered so quietly he could barely hear him through the pulse in his ears. Loki chuckled. No, this smug Demon child could not. He charged his magic up, from whatever reserves he could find. "But…I won't. It'd make things difficult for me. You're powerful of ability, but you're weak of mind. You're intelligent, yet ignorant to this situations' undercurrents. Why are you even here? Does this wand, this human ant mound mean that much to you?" Hakudoshi sounded almost curious. Loki spat.

"Let me assure you, no one here cares what a cowardly, wayward spirit thinks." Loki could have breathed fire in that instant he was so angry. He teleported a scant distance away from the Demon child who had come too close for his physical comfort.

"The bloodloss must have gotten to your head." Hakudoshi sighed. "You should ask yourself, Loki God of Mischief, why this senile magician and that purple thug desire to capture you or Sesshomaru so badly. Key word: 'or'. He doesn't want both you of you, he just needs the one that is easier to take." Hakudoshi paused letting the information sink in.

"Step away from Glow Stick, Casper. You're fighting a losing battle." Natasha sounded sure but Loki put his left hand out to stop her.

"The reasons Nebula and I are here are firstly to retrieve that wand, second demoralize the peasants here, then to retreat at the first sign of trouble. But if you think about it, does that really make sense?" Hakudoshi continued, undeterred. He had almost faded from view, but he could still hear him.

Loki had figured The Other and Thanos' goal was never the scepter. But whose was?

"You see, one of my allies wants the wand, and one of my allies thought retrieving it would be convenient because you'd be lured by its siren song to be plucked from your allies. Do you think they are the same person?" Hakudoshi's grip had all but faded on his shoulder.
"I don't need you to spell things out for me, brat." Loki grimaced, knowing of course Hakudoshi had to be speaking about two different people.

"Runt! Pack it up, his magic is too unstable to capture!" Nebula called out urgently.

"Going by our reason for being here, for whose cause, for whose sake do you think Nebula and I are fighting for?" Hakudoshi prosed and though Loki couldn't see him, he knew this smug Demon was smirking.

Loki's breath hitched thick and wet. He laughed darkly.

Insurrection. Revolt. Defiance.

"You're outclassed. You won't succeed." Loki murmured and Hakudoshi clicked his tongue.

"Ah, this isn't the first time I've done this, and I've learned from my mistakes. Have you? Doesn't look like it the way you're bleeding out and your magic running rampant and low. Now that I have done this favor for you, you will do one for me. Tell Sesshomaru that Kagura is here and she is even more insufferable as a spirit than she ever was alive." Hakudoshi informed, his voice and Loki could only see a faint outline of the small figure. And Loki tilted his head in thought, vision dimming.

"Now, Hakudo—!" Nebula ordered and in a flash Hakudoshi had vanished, his barely opaque figure now at her side. Could he teleport?

"We will take our leave now." Hakudoshi called out in his mind and Nebula vanished from sight. They were likely aboard the Aethon.

"Did she just disappear?" Rogers half groaned, but before Loki could answer he smelled something, something like Sho's acid whip when it wrangled you.

He saw the purple and green smoke billow out from where Nebula and Hakudoshi had disappeared. Demonic miasma.

"Don't breathe!" Loki warned knowing it may be too late already. He teleported to Rogers who had already begun to cough and wheeze and Natasha who had inhaled too much already, struggling to get some sort of mask for airborne toxins that appeared damaged beyond functionality.

Their veins had begun to turn a purplish black around their necks and their breathing stuttered to a stop.

"The Nines!" Loki couldn't pursue and ensure the departing Aethon and heal the humans, his magic had been basically depleted.

"That's Naraku's miasma! It's deadly against humans! That dreadful Hakudoshi!" Loki noticed Jaken had scrambled his way back to him, scepter in his green hand. His glamour did not hold out, but it hardly mattered now.

"I will attempt to dispel the toxin. Keep back." Loki honestly hadn't the slightest clue if he could do it, or detoxify Natasha's or Rogers' bloodstreams.

But… he in a way owed it to them both. Natasha kept his secret in Asgard and Rogers was one of the first few to trust him by standing next to him on Starks tower rooftop.

"Once more Yggdrasil, lend me your aid. Help me…" Loki trailed off as words failed him. He
hadn't even thought how Clint would feel if his closest confidant, Natasha perished here.

"Help me be the healer Stark claims me to be…" as soon as he bubbled his magic out Yggdrasil responded instantly. Immediately a luxurious rush of warmth washed over his body. It was if he drank three chaises of the Asgardian mead Thor loved so.

The emerald green magic flowed true and freely. Effortlessly the green pods broke and the shimmering magic cloud negated the purple miasma.

Natasha and Rogers remained unresponsive.

"…Come back!" Loki urged his magic forth and the green spores expanded, filling the air with the scent of cloves.

"I've never seen anyone get rid of Naraku's miasma before." Loki saw Jaken's wounds were not healed, but he could never heal a Demon anyway. The same was not the same elsewhere. The damage to the infrastructures, roads, and even the top of the Pearl Tower had either built back back up or and repaired themselves.

His own wounds, even the ones inflicted by Hakudoshi had begun to mend at a rapid pace.

A sputtering wheeze escaped Rogers' mouth and a gasp came from Natasha's.

Loki couldn't believe it. He had never taken naturally to Frigga's healing arts. How in the nine realms had Yggdrasil manifested such unbridled restorative magic in him. These healing arts, however, had cost him the capture of the Aethon. The daunting vessel had successfully retreated into the sky.

Loki bent down and helped a still somehow glamoured Natasha and Rogers to their feet and looked around. The mortals of Shanghai had clamored around them, taking photos, videos and the Nines knew what else.

He supposed he would just have to deal with his adoring fans. He vaguely remembered saying something to that effect the night he had the nightmares. Oh yes, No rest for the wicked.

Loki did the only thing he could do. He smiled and waved.

He was the diva was he not?

Chapter End Notes

Surprise Jaken and Hakudoshi. Poor Loki and friends have definitely bitten off a little more than they can chew.

and who doesn't love a good mutany?!

Happy (early) Halloween to everyone! there might be some grammar mistakes in this chapter that will iron out with some minor edits but please let me know how you enjoyed this chapter!

Thank you again for all of your support, I love each of your comments :)

Clint and the Hidden Intentions

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clint and the Hidden Intentions

*(*)

Clint pulled back from the moment a bit.

He had to come to grips with the reality that Loki had his hot mouth slanted over his neck again and his smooth hands planted in his pants, with his long fingers curled around his ass.

Was his ass even that great? Loki sure seemed obsessed with it. Obsessed with all of him, actually. And maybe he was just a little overly concerned for the easily agitated god too. He shouldn't have pretty much flipped out that Loki had gone to Shanghai.

Loki's roving hands persisted in groping his ass and trying to get between his pants and the small of his back. Was now really the best time for this?

Loki moaned in his mouth as if to answer his mental question. Clint moaned back on reflex and equal desire.

But really. He shouldn't have assumed that Thor, Loki, Nat, Steve, and Jaken all went to Shanghai before confirming where Thor actually was. Sesshomaru had to stop him with his whip from starting something with Tony.

Tony was smart, sure. Genius smart, but he didn't know everything. He didn't know the scepter like he did and he shouldn't act like it. What happened in Sesshomaru's failed scry also hit too close to Clint's panic zone. The scepter just did things to him that threw his normal calm into spiked extremes. It changed everything about who he thought he was. It warped his skills, talents, work ethic into the exact opposite morals, and beliefs he held dear.

It made Clint question everything. What if SHIELD didn't end up recruiting him, but some terrorist organization? Could he have ever been something as amoral as the scepter made him be?

Loki slipping from the needy, hot and thirsty kiss by running the point of his tongue along his ear brought him out of his weird thought loop.

Clint exhaled shakily, Loki's tongue brought chills through his collarbones and down his obliques.

'I existed once. I truly did, you know that.'Loki's words still echoed in his head from time to time, but this was a really weird time for it to happen. He wanted nothing more than to prove Loki wrong, that he still did exist. I mean really how could a ghost make his gut fill with warmth better than any shot of whiskey?

Loki grazed his teeth down his neck and bit there, sucking. Clint's hands scrubbled down Loki's toned back, as if looking for something to hold onto. He wanted to hold onto Loki. He didn't want him to go, he didn't want him to stop either.

Loki stop being Loki? Impossible.
He shouldn't have even entertained the idea Loki would simply teleport Nat, Steve and Jaken to where the scepter was and not insist on helping retrieve it. He probably shouldn't have implied that Jaken wasn't ready for a mission like this. That only caused Sesshomaru to crack his knuckles and his ears to flatten.

Loki brought his face back up to his own, eyes dark and soft and devoured him in a hazy, velvet shadows again. But his mind was in overdrive. He couldn't stop thinking.

'I shouldn't have thrown the fact that I was with Fancy Pants seeing his mom over him. It was painfully obvious Tony was at least halfway jealous I went even though that wasn't my fault. I could tell I had floored Tony when I threw it in his face that I knew more about the scepter, and Fancy Pants' issues than he ever would. I could tell because his jaw slacked and he didn't have a witty comeback. Even though Tony, clearly, is way smarter than I am, and I let him have every opening to say so.' Clint inwardly sighed, for what was probably the twentieth time that day, trying to calm himself down. It wasn't working.

He really shouldn't have used his assertions about Jaken being in danger, and mentioning how just being near the scepter could control you, to compel Sesshomaru scry the situation ASAP. He manipulated Sesshomaru, just like accused his mother of doing to him, but he needed to know if Loki was alright, if the mission was even going to succeed.

"That…definitely felt like a knock on our front door. Felt…far away…somehow." Tony murmured, looking Sesshomaru dead in the eye. While Clint could tell by the hardening of Tony's lips he was nervous, Sesshomaru didn't so much bat an eyelash.

"One of the enemy vessels has arrived at this realm. According to Loki's reports, it is most likely the Aethon." Sesshomaru calmly informed, turning to the TV. Nothing looked out of the ordinary.

"Sir, I put the D.E.M.O.N.S. disturbance at approximately 9,500 miles from Earth, directly above North Korea, yet well out of the Earth's outer most layer of atmosphere. The ship is estimated to be 2,200 feet long with a width of around 450 feet." Jarvis relayed the information, but it didn't reassure Clint. Whatever this thing was, was twice as long as a Nimitz class aircraft carrier. Which meant also twice the as SHIELD's helicarriers.

"Which subsequently is well out of the range of our largest ICBM's. Thanos has done his homework. He probably examined the one I threw at him." Tony tapped a whole bunch of other screens. "Except us, no one knows about it and let's keep it that way." Tony pointed a stylus Clint, which probably cost how much he made in two months. He didn't appreciate the gesture.

"Didn't Loki say that one was the fastest, and smallest? And it's twice as big as the helicarrier?!" Bruce caught on fast too.

"They've got to be heading towards Shanghai. We have to do something like warn Thor and Loki somehow." Clint was mostly talking to Sesshomaru who was doing his best to ignore him.

"Point Break isn't with them. He went to save Dr. Foster and that other doctor who lost his marbles. And they're on a stealth mission anything we send them, even through Jarvis because he was hacked before, could tip off the redcoats in SHIELD of what they're up to." Tony kept messing around with that stupid stylus pen of his. Clint caught the smallest softening of Sesshomaru's shoulders. He relaxed, and Clint knew that it was because it was another person, along with Tony, himself, Bruce, and Rin who weren't a part of his scry.
"If Loki allows a city to fall to Thanos' weakest vessel, he has indeed lost his prowess." Sesshomaru haughtily exhaled through his nose. Clint got a little hot, cuticles itching. He liked to pick at them when people were purposely pissing him off.

"You can scry them though, can't you? What if the whole thing is a trap? What if they lured them out with the scepter, only to blast the whole city?" Clint had to be living in some alternate universe where people didn't panic over alien space ships about to enter earth's atmosphere and possibly destroy a city. Sesshomaru just blinked back at him slowly as if to say, 'Of course I can you dull human'.

"You've got some nerve. You are just a few arrows short of a quiver aren't you, Clint? The last thing we need is for Sesshomaru to go on a vision quest. Do you not remember him passing out and puking up a keg's worth of blood on my roof?" Tony shrugged when Sesshomaru shot him a caustic look. "You just got back, it sounds like you've been through hell, I can tell you probably don't want to go all green. The ship hasn't even moved on Shanghai yet." Tony crossed his arms. Sesshomaru didn't appear to be fazed, but Clint caught something soften in his facial features.

"Barton, it is sufficient to simply witness this unfold." Sesshomaru spaced his words evenly and his voice soothed over everyone in the room.

Until Jarvis.

"Ah, sir, the vessel, tentatively labeled 'The Aethon' as begun to move with a trajectory consistent with Shanghai." Jarvis announced and Clint threw his arms up and pointed at the TV. This was the beginning of the invasion, and they weren't prepared at all. Failure streaked across his mind, and the one person he would rather chew glass than talk to was the forefront to call to salvage the situation.

"Fine, then I'm going to have to call this in to Fury. If that ship decides to fire on that city, it could cost thousands or millions of lives." Clint then just remembered about his phone being tapped. "Fancy Pants at least pass me your phone." Though Clint phrased it like a plea, it was more a call of sanity. Sesshomaru made no move to do so, and Clint's blood pressure spiked.

Apparently their jaunt through his mother's skull tomb didn't give him phone rights.

"If you tell Fury we know about the ship now, and one of his little spies is there with him, it will tip Thanos' hand that we can sense him coming. Our singular advantage we have, poof, up in smoke. The ship will enter the exosphere any moment and soon be visible to all military. Just wait for then. Do you really want to blow all my hard work, our entire planet's best defense out of the water on a hunch?" Tony's voice grated and squared up to Clint. Clint bristled back. The fucking nerve of this guy! 'my hard work' my ass! Everyone here has worked hard and sacrificed a lot and sometimes brilliantly tailored plans go to shit and you just have to sit and bare it.

Clint bit back the barbed words itching to fling themselves from his mouth. Well. Almost all of them.

"Glad to know you view preserving your hard work first, and safety of the world is second. Clearly now I know where you stand. We don't know what kind of weapons that ship has! Maybe it can fire long range and send Shanghai back to the feudal era...ugh...sorry no offense Fancy Pants, before anyone in the Pacific can scramble anything. The nearest Helicarrier is near Hong Kong and if we tell them now maybe they can make it in time. This isn't only just countless nameless people to you Tony, this is Nat and Cap. This is Loki." Clint turned from Tony and Bruce to look at Sesshomaru. "This is about Jaken too, can he really handle himself in battle? He is afraid of Tony's bathtub!" Clint hammered home his point. It was then Sesshomaru slowly turned towards the room, his
sharp, slicing eyes flickered from Clint, to Tony, to Bruce. Clint almost took a step back, as if he was needled between the eyes.

"For all your collected strength and intelligence, you both would argue with the other over a bone." Sesshomaru nearly growled out. He was on a short fuse today.

"Hey, being stubborn has gotten me to where I am today." Tony remarked with his usual grating snark and Clint's arms got goosebumps from the temperature drop caused by Sesshomaru.

Bruce made a 'maybe they have a point' gesture to both Clint and Tony.

"I really don't want to butt in, but something tells me that if it was a trap, they would want to capture Loki first then...open fire. That may give us some time...maybe." The words got caught up in Bruce's throat quietly and Clint cursed.

He couldn't let them get Loki again. It was an entire battleship against just them and whatever the Chinese could scramble which wasn't much at a literal moment's notice.

"Sesshomaru..." Clint exasperated gestured to the Demon who could eviscerate him with his hangnail. Sesshomaru vowed to not let him get captured again. Didn't he get how important this was?

Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles and green toxin seeped from his nailbeds.

"I shall take a closer look on what is transpiring and assist Loki, though I doubt he will truly need it, Barton." Sesshomaru's voice had that weird chill to it that put Clint on edge. Clint sometimes forgot that he was something completely different from either human or Aesir. The way Fancy Pants could direct his words would make long dormant alarm bells ring in his ears similar to when he was on an Op and it was about to be blown sideways.

But he would weather Fancy Pants' wrath if it saved thousands of people. If it could help Loki defeat a foe he probably didn't even know was about to beat down their door.

"I almost wish I went with them, it probably would have been less stress all around." Bruce simply sighed. Ugh, thanks big guy.

"I trust you Sailor Moon, but I'm not carrying you anywhere when you're wearing your boa because I've officially run out of lint rollers...So, don't pass out again." Tony continued with a question, his voice forced into a neutral tone. Clint could tell Tony was concerned and pissed at the same time. Clint knew Sesshomaru had a point though. There was no way they were ready for a war if they couldn't get over their differences.

But Clint wasn't about to back down on something as important as this. Sesshomaru didn't understand the scepter and what it could do. Loki would definitely need his help.

"This Sesshomaru is no drawn, yellow haired girl." Sesshomaru cut back, Clint could have sworn in a playful way. Tony looked shocked, then frowned petulantly the only way Tony could make half intelligent.

"You're clearly distracted." Loki grumbled glancing away from Clint moodily. Shit. Clint propped himself up and reached out to anchor Loki with a touch. Loki just looked at Clint's hand as if he couldn't decide whether he wanted to bite it or flinch away from it.

"It's not.... Crap it's not personal. There is just a lot, and I mean a lot, going on and..." Clint
paused, mouth a bit dry. Actually, he didn't really know why he was feeling like a ball of static electricity. He just was really on edge. He could usually easily decompress after a bad battle, or hell even after the first battle of New York. He couldn't right now though, and nothing even terrible happened.

Just what was wrong with him? Man, Clint pull yourself together.

He still hadn't told Loki he could see those spirits too. That he was some sort of magic user too. He didn't think that Loki would care… really.

So, he really shouldn't be hesitant to tell him. Right? That couldn't be what was really eating at him. It had to be something else.

"What? You're calling this off then?" Loki pulled back, eyes intense and so much sharper and closed off than before. Clint focused on Loki's furrowed dark eyebrows. It was if just then someone had put his face into high contrast, the color had also drained from his face and he looked almost like a mannequin. Clint then figured out what he meant.

"Huh? No. Damnit, stop always jumping to conclusions. You are a category one catastrophic thinker. Look, I found something out when I went with Fancy Pants to his mother's freaky tomb… spirit castle thing." Clint said exasperated. He was really doing a bad job at this wasn't he? He wasn't even sure if this was what was bothering him.

He studied Loki for a bit, he wasn't hurt anymore, he was fine, more than fine. Loki not only survived the battle but was the only reason Nat and Cap did. God he owed so much to Loki, so many people did. Well, obviously Nat, Cap, and even little green Jaken ended up saving the damn day. Who knew Jaken had it in him?!

Poor Little Green was now stuck helping Tony contain the scepter in substorage room 3-b which was now being converted into a swirly youki room Bruce named the 'Rave room'. Clint was fairly certain that Bruce had no idea what a rave was. Though the rogue thought of a Hulk in a rave did crack a small smirk.

Though Loki, Steve, Bruce, and Natasha got angry Sesshomaru wouldn't destroy the scepter, Clint was the only one who knew that Sesshomaru couldn't because he couldn't destroy the Others' magic. He saw the way Sesshomaru flinched and grit his fangs because of that freaky carving on his arm.

Tony just seemed glad to have him back, and his carpet stain-free.

But if Sesshomaru would rather have half the Avengers pissed at him and keep his pride, he wouldn't tell Loki why Sesshomaru turned his back on the scepter, leaving it with Jaken.

"Well?" Loki really sounded irritated. But, as powerful as Loki was, it was still a really close call. Clint suddenly saw the deathly white figure, and the blood covered spear glinting off the rising sun.

"You know, forget it. It doesn't even really matter. What you did, though, was incredible. I had no idea how powerful you could be. And I'm not just talking about your shields, but you healed Cap and Nat. They told us about the poison gas." Clint complimented sincerely, and he noticed Loki positively beam.

"As I said before when we were wearing much less attire, flattery will get you nowhere. What you spoke of earlier most certainly matters to me. What did you find out? Did you find out anything of
importance that could help us?” Loki probed, sort of uncharacteristically. It was like his eyes were backlit with green magic, showing off flecks of blue in his eyes.

"Not…really." He was not about to go into the whole ‘where are the Demons now’ thing. That was up for Fancy Pants to divulge. "I…uh…could see her. You know. His mom’s spirit. Tony and I both could see that little white-haired demon spirit skewer you on TV. I can't wait to put one " Clint explained gathering momentum.

"How? How could you have seen them? Stark can only because he has started the mating process with Sho…but you?" Loki studied him, expression doing a complete 180.

Mating process? Did he miss something, again?

Never mind their drama, Clint so didn't need Loki acting overprotective and concerned over him when Clint himself had spent the better part of the day with his stomach percolating a nice fine ulcer over what was happening to Loki.

An image of Loki, holding his dagger to his throat and slicing it thick and deep across his neck. Eyes set, mouth hard. Loki nearly severed his jugular vein without even batting an eyelash. He wished he could chalk that up to Loki just knowing his limits, but he knew that sure motion meant one thing.

He had seen it before with Pietro, when Pietro gathered the weights they had for lifting, fitted them to a belt and stepped out into West Okoboji Lake, one sure step at a time.

Of course, from the distance Clint was watching, and the amount of alcohol that Pietro supplied him with, he had no idea Pietro had on weights. Clint thought he was just off to do some stupid stunt, like skinny dipping.

He knew, vaguely, that Pietro had never really learned to swim, but they had just had a fantastic night, watching Rounders and other stupid gambling movies. While sharing a couple bottles of tequila, Pietro admitted he wished he had Matt Damon's skill and luck. That the gambles he took would have eventually paid off.

That he could just as slick and smooth as quicksilver.

At the time, Clint thought he just meant joining the circus, it was a big gamble for him too. Everyday was difficult, it wasn't easy work. How could Clint have known that he meant the high stakes dice and poker games he spent most of his salary on to pay the coyotes back who smuggled, Vildan, Wanda, and Pietro himself into the country?

Easy, he could have wised up and watched, started really looking. But, it was cock-sure Pietro. Who always had an answer for everything, who always landed quick on his feet. He was never in over his head.

Until West Okoboji Lake was.

Clint remembered diving and diving and diving. He was not a great swimmer either and fuck was that water icy, black as pitch and he was still stupid drunk. Clint knew Pietro did that on purpose, if he was sober he may have made it.

He didn't see Pietro until everyone else saw emergency services haul his white, bloated body out of the lake.

He was too damn pale, just like how Loki could get.
Clint bit back a yell when he thought the same about Loki and the dagger to his throat. He would land on his feet. It wasn't just some stupid stunt like the snake-thing right?

"Sesshomaru said I am a priest. I first noticed something was off when I burned Colson with some purple light when you were a giant black cobra." Clint started finally, getting back on track. He didn't want to think of Pietro right now.

"Mamba." Loki automatically corrected. "Wait, you burned Coulson? I wish I was more cognizant to fully appreciate that. Did you burn him for me?" Something in Loki almost looked like it fractured open.

"Yeah, he was going to shoot you and I didn't have the leverage to stop him and all I remember was wishing that I wasn't just some…guy with a bow. That I had some special power within me too… and it just happened. It wasn't that cool, trust me. In trying to save your scaly ass I would have shot Sesshomaru in the head if Tony didn't grab Tenseiga. The magic itself was hardly a cigarette burn." Clint regretted saying anything, this was certainly going to go to Loki's head.

Loki, though, instead, appeared shell-shocked. Instead of a cock-sure grin of Clint defending him, his eyes looked through him, far away and almost a touch frightened. Clint didn't get it.

"You are far from just some mortal with a bow Clint. Even without your new found ability. Don't underestimate your strength, you'd do everyone a disservice if you continue to do so." Loki scoffed, running a finger down his chest to right where his tattoo was.

"Whatever. Fancy Pants said that you could train me, I can shoot purple, glowy magic arrows too. Guess it makes sense with me wearing purple all the time. The protection spell you put on me, without my permission mind you, awoke the power. I burned Fancy Pants' mom pretty bad, but she deserved it." Clint grinned a bit and Loki barked a dark laugh.

"I never met her, but by all accounts, I'd say you are correct in harming her. Funny, I had thought all the priests and priestesses of Midgard had been wiped out long ago, when the Demons vanished." Loki said and Clint stilled, hoping Loki wouldn't catch on that he knew what had happened to all of them.

Clint could only imagine just how pissed Loki would be at his old man when Fancy Pants finally got around to telling him. He knew it was important to Loki, but that wasn't his story to tell. He knew when something was deep and personal, and that was Loki and Fancy Pants to a T.

"If you're looking for me to train you, I can't, at least not well. Pure arcane magic is something I have never studied. Not even Frigga's magic is that pure, it's something only mortals can possess. I can try to assist you controlling it, but…. Wait." Loki then immediately vanished in what Clint had to assume was space time, because why not.

'He really. Really. Has to stop doing that. He better have not gone to Asgard and like kidnapped his own mom. I swear I should have never…' Clint grumbled and sat up when Loki reappeared with a golden bow. It gleamed in the light like gold at least, but Clint knew it couldn't possibly be solid gold. It'd make for a terrible bow.

"This is Ichaival, Odin's bow. He rarely used it. It was a special gift from the land of Ydalir and this may help focus your purification magic. I cannot guarantee anything, I could never make the bow work for me…at least I don't think I could. Maybe, it will serve you well." Loki held out the bow and Clint took it expecting it to be heavy, but instead it was surprising light. It also warmed his hand, like it had its own internal heat source.
But aside from having the same effect the grips on his Honda motorcycle had when he turned on the heat in winter, he didn't feel anything special. And he didn't want to shoot anything. And he didn't want Loki to teach him or solve his problems with more freaky magic.

It wasn't that he was anti-magic, or against using any advantage he got against these murderous aliens, he just wanted to do it on his own terms, by his own two hands with his own strength. At least, he deserved it to himself to give it his all on his own before resorting to what felt dangerously close to cheating.

Which was funny in its own way. Cheating against an enemy which could literally blow up their planet? Clint knew he should be scrabbling at any advantage they could have, hell he asked Fancy Pants for his help. He was being hypocritical. He got it.

"… I appreciate the gesture, but I want to try to do it without a magic bow. The ones I'm used to would make more sense to use." Clint pushed the bow back, whose name he didn't bother to remember.

Oh God. Please tell me it's not like, a real person like Bakusaiga or Tenseiga.

"No offense, uh... Val." The last syllable was 'val' right?

"Are you afraid Clint? Are you hesitant to know just how strong you are, or can be?" Loki challenged and damn, Clint really should have seen it coming. Clint's face flushed.

"No. That's not it. I want to do it my way, on my own terms. I don't want help from magic bows or other things I don't need and understand less." Clint said resolutely. Loki quirked a dark eyebrow.

"That sounded like something Sho would say, perhaps less articulately....so it's simply that you don't trust me." Loki expression soured as he continued and Clint flopped back onto the bed.

He just had to have this conversation shirtless didn't he?

"Yeah, Loki. That's it. I don't trust you. I would let just any dude tie me up with magic and fuck me. No, I'll do you one better. I'll let you, the guy who I used to hate more than malaria diseased mosquitoes into my life, tell him some of my deepest secrets from my past, but totally not trust him at the same time. It's. Not. About. You. I went from run-of-the-mill special agent to... purple magic priest, which either sounds like a Saturday morning cartoon or a pedophile, in a matter of days. Our planet is either going to get invaded or blown to hell, you almost lost your goddamn mind again to the scepter which of course is just floors away from us. Not to mention the only thing keeping us in the loop on when we can expect doomsday to happen is a youki barrier which doesn't do us much good if the ships all have shields that only two Avengers can disable. So yeah. Me wanting to try to control this new ability of mine...me wanting to control this one thing on my own, is totally about you." Clint released a ball of tension he had apparently been holding between his shoulder blades.

Loki leaned back a bit, assessing him silently. Clint couldn't keep his brain on track. His mind kept wheeling around and looping like one of Tony's satellite careening through orbit.

"Annnnd great. He's passed out again, and Backstreet Boy is all radioactive. Thanks 'Jumpy' for that one. Now his...stripes are all black and his eyes are rolled back in his head and I swear if he ralphs all over this white rug Pep picked out its coming out of your paycheck, not Agent's." Tony was legitimately pissed; he just hid it well under his humor, and one armored hand which was trying to keep Bakusaiga's green aura at bay. It didn't take a genius to figure out Tony, while trying
to prop Sesshomaru up on the sofa, was probably plotting the thousand different he could get him back for sending Fancy Pants into another fit.

Clint didn't care if it helped Loki not succumb to the scepter, and to alert everyone of the presence of the spaceship. Sesshomaru always bounced back, it's what he did. he probably just got lightheaded and will come to any second now.

"Yeah, well, I might not get another paycheck if we don't save the day." Clint sighed.

"Oh, if we don't save your paycheck, you'll be damned sure I'll avenge part of it for this carpet... shoo!" Tony kicked at one of the roombas, (maybe the Kane Roomba?) who wasn't anywhere close to him. He really hoped whatever thing Sesshomaru's crackpot mom gave him actually worked and wasn't some ruse. He had to make sure Loki didn't lose his mind again, get captured or both. Clint cursed at himself, he sounded like a love novel.

"Oh yeah, it's the carpet you're worried about. Don't you think you should admit and focus on what really matters?" Clint clipped back, knowing it was a low blow because it was obvious to everyone that Tony was just barely masking his real concern for Fancy Pants and the rest in China but he was so done with Tony's nonchalant attitude.

"Lord Sesshomaru's pulse is faint and low, but steady sir. His brain activity however has all but ceased. He is in a comatose state" Jarvis sounded out and Tony didn't have a quip for that. Clint's guilt also ate at him because Munchkin had hunkered next to Sesshomaru on the sofa, eyes all soft and big. Tony cursed something under his breath as he brushed some hair out of his face with a quick flick of the back of his fingers.

If Fancy Pants were mentally there he probably would have tried to break one of those fingers. But he wasn't. He remained unconscious and propped up on the sofa because Tony wouldn't let them lay him down. His markings were still black and all swirly, even his eyelids, made his skin so pale by contrast it looked almost translucent. His breath came out the barest of ragged puffs.

"Let me know if his vitals change, J. We got bigger fish to fry it seems." Tony meant to sound furious, but he sounded weary. An unexpected wash of guilt doused Clint's stomach. Maybe he had laid it on a little thick.

"Clint, I get where you're coming from. I do, but you provoking Tony is not helping my stress levels." Bruce scratched his head, grimacing trying to get it together. Clint felt like shit but there was nothing they could do about it now.

"Yeah, yeah, lecture me later. I'm sure Fancy Pants will come around soon, his mom gave him a special necklace to go on the Astral...something and Bakusaiga isn't losing it anymore, she's calmed down. Tenseiga too. He'd definitely be freaking out if he was in any real danger, he can get real protective." Clint reassured, looking at the Bakusaiga and Tenseiga, remembering their Demon forms, still processing how such a thing could be possible. He liked them though.

Bruce and Tony exchanged a long look.

"She huh? You spoke to his mother? How? You both told me it was her tomb." Tony circled back on Clint like a shark. He could smell when something didn't add up.

"I can see them too. The spirits. It's a long story and I wish i didn't have to deal with it...and look there is more important things happening right now than a really dysfunctional family reunion." Clint blurted out, trying to ease Tony down off the storm he was riding.
"...Fine Long Island Medium, pray tell, why did you lose your shit like a black Friday shopper in the Walmart electronics section? It couldn't just be about Horns getting snatched, he is pretty good at evasion as we have all figured out." Tony's voice had dipped low and threatening, as if it wasn't a convincing story he would grab a guillotine.

"Remember 'Crabocalypse' and that failed scry where Fancy Pants saw his death? Well I saw what he saw. Turns out he saw us all get slaughtered like cattle in Shanghai, and not by the Aliens, but by Thor and Loki. In the scry, some blue skinned alien woman, like something out of a gritty avatar reboot, had the scepter and mind-controlled Loki and Thor to kill us one by one. What's worse is no one bothered to tell Fancy Pants about the scepter until I did today, he just thought Loki and Thor decided to play for the other team. Also, in the scry, a battleship was above Shanghai and the whole city was in ruins." Clint jutted his chin out with a gloomy grin in a 'yeah I had a damn good reason' expression.

"Oh, yeah that would do it." Bruce amended, Tony just watched Sesshomaru slumped on the sofa, Tony had made sure his precious hair didn't touch the floor lest a rogue Jonathan Toews #19 Roomba would run over it.

Clint thought it was a bit funny Tony fusssed over the prissy Demon Lord so much when a spaceship could blow them all to kingdom come.

"Anything else from family reunion time you care to share with the rest of the class?" Tony egged on.

"Well his textbook-narcissist mother would give you a run for your money Tony. It's miraculous Fancy Pants came out this well-adjusted. She said basically there was no way he was surviving this invasion and that we should expect failure. Not only that, she said that Thanos has been here before, and that Sesshomaru lost the war against him five hundred years ago." Clint collapsed down onto the sofa next to Rin. Rin turned to him, tilting her head at Clint. He had forgotten she was still holding the daffodils Sesshomaru picked for her.

"Thanos was here before? And Sesshomaru lost to him? That's impossible because he's on my sofa. Wait. Time travel, Loki must have made two different branches in time." Tony paused and Clint could smell the smoke coming from Tony's burning brain. Clint nodded.

"Yeah, and she let him have it for losing the war too. She blamed it all on way Maleficent explained it, is that our timeline is the time Thanos came here looking for a cosmic gem and to enslave all of the Demons to be his army. When Thanos won the war, Fancy Pants' mom and Odin managed to seal away all the Demons somewhere, and I guess erase their whole existence. With nothing to win, Thanos moved on. The whole time she was having a conniption fit trying to convince him to leave us for dead, and go find wherever Odin hid the Demons and then rule them. I honestly probably should have just waited in the Quinjet." Clint began to feel the dull thrum of a migraine prickle behind his eye sockets.

"Lord Sesshomaru's mother must be really worried. Jaken told me Lord Sesshomaru's mother never reveals her true feelings." Rin frowned and Clint laughed a bit.

"Oh yeah. Real worried. First thing she does is thanking him for bringing her dinner, meaning me, then she tears into him for liking humans, which made Tenseiga go off. Fancy Pants didn't seem to care what his mother had to say. He cared more about the Meido Stone or whatever it's called, being missing." Clint admitted, noticing Tony remained seeped in anger, eyes not leaving Sesshomaru.

Clint noticed Bruce gave him a suspicious look, but didn't say anything.
"Ah! The Meido Stone is very powerful! It's what brought me back to life when Lord Sesshomaru's mother summoned a demon that sent Kohaku and I to the underworld! Jaken told me I died there." Rin informed and everyone turned to her surprised except Tony who took another swig of his drink. His mother killed Rin with a Demon from the Underworld? Just what in the hell? Like, literal hell? She was officially more terrifying than Nat.

"Yeah Jaken gave me the quick and dirty on Sailor Moon's mom." Tony slurred. "She has the maternal instincts of a XM25 grenade launcher." Tony turned away, hopefully to throw his almost spent bottle of scotch down the drain.

"That's one way of putting it. The Meido Stone is apparently one half of the cosmic gem which makes it even more of a headache." Clint leaned back, staring at the ceiling wondering just when things had gotten so complicated.

"Definitely sounds like A + parenting...wait the ship should be entering the atmosphere now....oh man these guys are good. They entered the atmosphere right above Shanghai." Tony brought up hacked video feed from who knows what camera. It wasn't even dawn quite yet but it already looked like it due to the slow moving fireball lurching across the night sky.

"Sir, Director Fury is currently coming up the elevator, he was granted permission by Miss Potts on the grounds he came alone, unarmed, and she and Happy have apparently held one of his own drivers hostage as some sort of collateral." Jarvis sounded. Clint stood and immediately assumed a tactical position behind Tony's minibar. He wasn't afraid of Fury damnit. No. He just didn't want Fury to know he was there.

"Good thinking Pepper. Fine. Let him up. If he takes one step out of line I'll leave him to you Jarvis. One. Step. And he better have one fu-" Tony paused looking at Munchin. "fun olive branch...No, olive tree. No, all of Greece, to give me." Tony stole a glance to Fancy Pants and back to Munchin.

"Yeah, Fancy Pants is not going to be happy Fury is going to see him sleeping on the job." Clint scrunched his face. Wait...if Fancy Pants was on the sofa...well....he was literally hiding for nothing if he didn't want Fury to know they survived the crash.

"I have to commend Fury's impeccable timing. I don't think Sesshomaru over here would let him walk out of here...maybe not even the other guy would. I think I'll go on the roof to get some air." Bruce tugged at the collar on his shirt, skin clammy. Both Clint and Tony nodded like bobbleheads.

"Stark, I cannot tell you much I want to take a hot, steaming—" Fury came storming in, obviously completely forgetting what had taken place the last time he had been here.

"Language! Child present, and one I more than tolerate I might add. Oh, and Legolas is behind the mini bar, after going as Cap's date to the Yankees game he really caught that 'language' bug too. Play nice." Tony interjected. Rin smiled and waved.

Clint stood up from behind the mini bar as slowly as possible, face red as Stark's suit. He really, really hated that arrogant jackass sometimes.

"Hello Fury! Lord Sesshomaru can't talk because he is scrying master Jaken who is away helping uncle Loki on a treasure quest. Would you like a flower? You look grumpy, like when Uncle Inuyasha doesn't want to ask Lord Sesshomaru for help but has to." Rin hopped up and held out a daffodil to fury, beaming her bubbly smile.
Fury eyed Tony then Clint, then carefully took the flower stem in his hand, eye never leaving Clint.

"Thank you. Well, at least one thing has gone right today. I haven't gotten any god-darn intel from that crash, though Romanoff did sound a bit too composed on the phone with me to think anything seriously did happen to you." Fury spoke directly to Clint and to Clint's surprise, his tone actually lifted. Was it just because Rin was in the room, or did Fury really care that he was alright?

"No thanks to SHIELD. The rogue element in SHIELD planted the bomb on the Quinjet, it was only because of Sesshomaru I—" Clint was immediately interrupted from his rant.

"Yes, I know. I sent my people along with Coulson and Hill to round up the sweeper team in Iowa for interrogation. The real question is why you were going to the Salt Flats in the first place. It sure as hell wasn't just to race Ducatis, I was born on a Tuesday, but not last Tuesday. And please tell me why we picked up Thor's presence going across the Atlantic, and a faint blip of Loki's magic in Shanghai before our magic detectors went offline due to your stunt, Stark!" Fury's body had tensed up so much it was probably harder than Tony's suit.

"You want the short version or the long version?" Clint asked, migraine growing.

"The quickest and correct version you can give me so we can figure out a strategy for holding off the enemy space craft!" Fury sounded justifiably angry.

"Well, Fancy Pants and I got intel that the rogue element in SHIELD is conducting 'Operation Ultron'. Their plan was to eliminate me and Dr. Selvig, but more importantly to break into the SHIELD bunker in Shanghai, steal the scepter from SHIELD, and give it to...well whoever is piloting the Aethon." Clint reported, falling back uneasily into the rhythm he used to use with him when he was a SHIELD agent.

Whoa. Was. Was a SHIELD agent.

"Patches O'hoolihan, your spies are working directly with Thanos to give him the weapon that almost succeeded with in an invasion last time, and you've done nothing about this. In fact, the last time you graced us with your presence, you shot up my tower and tried to have Sesshomaru imprisoned. We had to send crazy eyes, with Capsicle, Natasha, and a gremlin to go stop your spies from doomed human existence. So, you better have a good way to help us, because I am sure as hell-lo— kitty not helping you." Tony's voice blazed through the room as the Aethon came out of its smoldering smoke cloud to hover above the atmosphere.

"I'm with Tony on this one, which is new for me to say. Things have changed and now we have to run point. SHIELD may have started the Avengers initiative, but now SHIELD has to answer to it.” Clint crossed his arms.

"Run point for now. We've already scrambled the f-22s from the helicarrier in Hong Kong when we first got a read on it. They will be there in just under twenty-two minutes to assist China. We don't know how much effect they will have because we can't shoot it down on top of the city, and no, before you ask, the council has no authority to nuke the son of a bit-coin." Fury eyed the yellow flower in his hand. "This is unprecedented. The IFO we acquired recently is a toy in comparison to this thing. That ship could potentially raze Shanghai, a city with more than two time the population of New York, in a matter of minutes." Fury pursed his lips eye coming off of Rin, and we all looked towards the screen. Man, if Steve were here, he would be patting everyone on the back for adhering to his language pact.

"Don't worry! Uncle Loki and Jaken will stop them." Rin said simply while twirling a daffodil. She began to hum a song.
"I hope so, he doesn't have the best track record with defending Earth but now we will see if he changed his tune." Fury almost cracked a smile at Rin. Clint's blood immediately started to simmer but before he could get in anything to rebuttal Fury, Rin responded.

"Uncle Loki thinks of my Lord as his brother. He won't let him down. He likes it here, and Jaken can be strong too, even though he is annoying." Munchin was practically beaming. It reminded Clint of when he doubted Loki earlier, how Rin was one of the only people who really believed in him. It warmed Clint enough to clear his throat.

"I agree. If anyone can stop the Aethon it would be Loki. And effective immediately, Fury, I resign as a SHIELD agent. Considering what has happened though, it would surprise me if there was a SHIELD left after we root out the traitors." Clint double downed and stared unwavering into Fury's dark eye. Fury stilled, apparently processing the information.

"I'm personally not so sure about little green, but statistically speaking, Avengers with green skin haven't disappointed. Oh and, good call bullseye, SHIELD is a sinking ship. Current affairs actually accentuate this." Tony chimed in, which Clint definitely didn't need. It was sort of true, but he really didn't need Tony backing him up. It really irrationally irked him that he somehow Tony thought he needed to cosign on everything, but he wasn't going to say anything.

"Well, I can't say I'm surprised, you can turn in you—" Fury started but stopped when Rin bounced up from the sofa.

"Uncle Loki is on TV!" Rin pointed. Of course, the eight-year-old noticed before anyone else did.

Clint locked on to a frantic looking man, long, tangled hair whipping in the wind. Clint didn't say a word as he tried to catalog any injuries he may have sustained. He was standing straight enough, he wasn't too pale, at least he didn't think so. Loki promised him that he wouldn't allow Earth to go up against Thanos alone, but it was then it finally dawned on Clint that he had never promised the same to Loki in return.

"He's alone against it. Fuck, he's all alone out there....and there isn't a damn thing we can do." Clint's voice came out more dark and brittle than he thought it would.

His fist was clinched and his shoulders rigid. Loki promised him he would never abandon them, but this sure as hell looked like that they sent him out as a fox for the hounds. Clint stole a look to Sesshomaru who was still passed out. Tony was studying the Demon intently though he put up a huge front that he wasn't.

"I've had enough of you staring into the sheets of this bed. They aren't even that high of a thread count. Hogunn could pick out a better set and he sleeps in what mortals call hemp!" Loki's teeth were clenched and Clint made a face.

"No, you aren't allowed to ask me how I know what sheets Hogunn has on his bed. Who...no. What? Give me something! I am the God of Lies, not a mind reader, Clint. I cannot fix something if I don't know what the problem is." Loki was shaking. Clint ran a hand through his hair, he didn't usually space out like this, he didn't usually do any of this.

"Loki I'm not something you can fix. I've just had a roller coaster, no, worse than a roller coaster of a day. I've talked to a Demon Spirit, got bombed out of a plane, got turned into light, got flown to Stark tower, resigned as a SHIELD agent, watched you get almost killed on some shitty cctvs by another Demon Spirit, and found out I can use magic. I can't get drunk because that's Tony's thing...I need to get laid. Yeah. I want you, now." Clint sputtered out. Did he really just say that?
"I was nowhere close to death. I would know." Loki sighed deeply and put the bow on the bed. He didn't say anything else, and well, didn't look enthused either. How could he seem so put out? He was just about to jump his bones! What was this?

Loki's pale hand slid over his own fisted one. The magic in Loki's skin tingled his hand and warmed it right up.

"You seem a little too tense, Clint. Maybe you need to get away…I have just the place." Loki smiled and magic now sparked in Clint's hand. Clint opened his mouth to say something but he caught the blue flecks in Loki's eyes light up from his magic. They weren't even considered fully green any longer, but a good part of Loki's signature green eyes now had that petrifying pool blue color.

"Lo—" His voice trailed off as space itself spun around him and maybe for the second time that day he had gone flying. The tall tell scent of pine darted into his nose as he inhaled sharply. He was annoyed Loki hadn't even thought of asking him first, but before he could tell him off he was sitting on a…very soft silky bed. It was green and black, this had to be one of Loki's hidden places.

"Did you just take me through a magic portal to your sex dungeon?" Clint looked around casually, trying not to get his SHIELD scanning training up and running.

Clint spotted old, beaten books, massive scrolls, a whole lot of rocks and crystals, the spear he saw Loki use against Fancy pants. All of it was tucked away cozily in little compartments, carved wooden boxes, or heavy, tall lacquered shelves. A sort of fantastical warmth radiated from the room, but it didn't necessarily feel lived in. Lanterns and sconces lit the room with a soft glow and in the corner of the room sat a massive treasure chest, just like one you'd imagine as a kid belonging on some pirate ship.

"No, I teleported you. I cannot create portals." Loki grinned with all his teeth and Clint just rolled his eyes.

"Ha. So, what's in the treasure chest, Captain Strapon? Big collection of dildos? Whips? Hulk sex-doll?" Clint hoped he didn't sound as nervous as he was. He hoped Loki would be open to taking things a little slowly. Clint still was white knuckling Loki's sheets. He got up hoping a little sort of innocent exploration would ease his mind. He jokingly went to the large chest to open the lid and Loki dropped the bow and reached out and stopped him

"Don't open it." Loki simply replied and Clint studied him. Hard. Loki was the God of Lies and while he had been trained by SHIELD to suss out lies, he was not as good as Nat. What was he hiding?

"Whoa, ok, I mean can I at least get a hint?" Clint evened his tone reassuringly. He knew Loki was secretive, but why bring him here if there was something so obviously tempting that he didn't want Clint to see?

"It houses something very important to me. It was given to me and then stolen from me. I finally managed to reclaim it. It is immensely powerful, hence why it is in such a robust container." Loki licked his lips, looking Clint directly in his eyes and he could still see the blue in them.

Clint instantly got cuticle-picking irritated again. He couldn't place why he was so agitated so he just changed the subject.
"I can see the blue in your eyes now. The same blue that is the color of the scepter and the tesseract. Fancy Pants earlier said you almost succumbed to the scepter, that he had to get Jaken to snap you out of it. You know he scryed that you were under control of the scepter, and you managed to break free right as Thor killed us all." Clint didn't know where he was going with this ramble, and he could tell Loki was antsy about it too. His fingers twitched.

"Please. We have an invading armada on our doorstep and you worry about my eye color. I'm fine, and worry even less about Sho's scrying. He scryed one possible future out of many. One that cannot even come to fruition now! It is not an accurate art for even master scholars like Frigga, and Sho knows next to nothing about magic." Loki huffed, sounding put out which only made Clint's throat itch in anger.

"Don't worry? My eyes were all blue when I was under the scepter's control but mine went back to normal when I got knocked out of it. It looks like it has some sort of permanent touch on you. And you're the one who made a big deal out of Sesshomaru scrying the first time!" Clint backed up from Loki to cool down before he did something stupid.

"Clint what are you really this worked up about?" Loki's green magic smoked out of his fingers and his eyes glinted hard. They were both on edge about something and it was about to ignite into something shitty.

"You almost got completely turned by the scepter today and you don't care and won't talk about it. I watched you slice your own throat! That Demon spirit, Haka-flacka or whatever was harpooning you, for fun. Nat and I have seen tough shit, and we have laughed off the scrapes we've gotten into, but we never...ugh we have never not cared about our own lives and that's how you came across today. Like if you died, or got brainwashed again it wouldn't matter because big brother Thor is here, and so is Fancy Pants. You're not expendable, we all have an important part to play." Clint burst out. Apparently, that thought had been clawing around in the base of his skull for the better part of the day. Clint decided not to get all mushy gushy on him and tell him he was important or something else that would really hand him in some lovey-dovey stuff he swore to Nat he'd never become.

Yet Loki reacted in way to his rant that he did not anticipate.

Loki laughed. It came out in brittle, sharp barks.

"I don't need you reminding me of the part I have to play, Clint. I am most fully aware of the magnitude of responsibility that rests on me. In fact, I do believe that I may be the most aware of any living being on this wretched planet. You say you don't like being treated like a child, so don't do the same to me in my own home." Loki clenched his fist and Clint clenched his jaw. He wanted out. This wasn't what he had in mind when he got reunited with Loki. When he ended up teleported back in Stark Tower, panting, covered in blood and shaking. He just wanted them to relax together. He could help Loki patch himself up and maybe...he didn't know...have a nice dinner, and maybe some 'dessert'. Not this.

"You're twisting my words! What I said wasn't condescending at all, you were downplaying the amount of danger you and everyone else were in." Clint's voice was raised again by this point, he had backed up, giving him space between him and Loki as if he could leave a room on his own volition that he had been teleported into by some imaginary door. He didn't have to be here, he didn't have to be taken for this ride.

"Again, inaccurate! I was well aware the plan to obtain the scepter was borderline madness, but it was necessary madness. It is not the same as Sesshomaru being pointlessly reckless and lunging into an unnecessary situation and letting things play out for his own pride. I precisely calculated
that if we could get the scepter, that whatever happened after would be of minimal risk. I would have teleported myself, Jaken and the two mortals out of harms way if I thought otherwise. The Mad Titan has no need destroying an economic city with no hierarchical leaders within it, and in no way would I have allowed myself to be captured by that wretched lot." Loki's magic around his fingers coiled green and his voice a steady low tone.

Clint…hadn't thought about that.

"So, you stayed to help the city because you wanted to protect the people?" Clint asked, and Loki laughed again.

"The Nines, you should know I'm not nearly that selfless. I wanted to make a stand, to show The Mad Titan what I am capable of. It worked, almost flawlessly. The city is unscathed, his Demon Spirit army showed vulnerabilities to my blood magic, and their ships' shields, for all the magic they have plundered from me, can easily be overridden by an almost extinct race." Loki chuckled and Clint laughed a little out of reflex probably more to himself than to Clint, he suspected. Clint rolled the new information around in his head.

"Plundered? The Other stole magic from you? You never did tell me what happened. Well. Not that you have to. I'm just saying." Clint could have really kicked himself just then. They had just gone and turned the mood around and just he just took them back down. He really was no good at this… whatever it was.

He stilled on the bed, not looking at Loki in the eyes but instead at his chest. Maybe Loki thought of himself like that chest. He had just got something back he lost.

Pause.

"When I let go of the Bifrost…" Loki started and Clint's stomach chilled and plunged into his throat.

Let go.

Loki…let go? He didn't fall? That meant…

Clint's brown eyes flashed wide and tried to find Loki's but Loki's were fixated on a magic crystal he was turning over and over in his hands. It was glowing like one of those geodes under a UV light. He grabbed Loki's knee, hoping that what he had done with trauma victims in the past would work well here.

Nate. Pietro.

"I wished to cease to be. I learned then to be careful what you wish for. The void I fell through… it muddled and flattened all my memories and emotions attributed to them into a hazy, opaque puddle. I no longer had any magic, much less the ability to discern faces, events, conversations from my past. It was as if all the different parts of my soul were blended together in an incomprehensible solution." Loki began, runes appearing in the air around them like smoke rings, and Clint had a hard time following but he just clenched Loki's knee tighter.

"That is when the Other found me in Sanctuary. He took me back to his battleship, The Relentless, and reconstructed me. He forged and molded my memories back for me, but at a very expensive cost." Loki clutched the crystal like a lifeline and runes began to appear, glowing on its surface, and Clint had a hard time following but he just clenched Loki's knee tighter.

"He solidified my memories again by glassing them over. He also as a result, created false ones,
and eliminated others all together. I can't even remember how I got Ichaival, or some of these magic crystals I must have obtained with Sho, among many other events. My memories became hard and cold, distant, and jagged. He infected all of me with the amplified emotions of hatred, resentment, jealousy, and shame, because it what I last truly felt when I was in Asgard." Clint pursed his lips, he had no idea what to say, so he just listened as Loki's voice strained not to crack. He wanted to push all of this out of Loki's mind.

"Bit by bit I flaked apart...he said I needed to understand my previous life, my previous destiny, was moot. He used my own previous insecurities, jealousy, resentment and hatred towards Thor, Odin, Frigga, Asgard and even to an extent Sho as well against me." Loki paused, the crystal glow dimmed into a dark blue.

"He said no one had ever truly wanted me." Loki's runes that had weaved themselves in the air lost their form and vanished. Loki thickly swallowed.

"In my new mind Thor always wanted to see me in his shadow, keeping me there and mocking me. Odin used me solely as a pawn in his political games, a mere means to an end. You see, Asgard never allowed me to become one of them. I was always an outsider and loathed for my cunning and magic arts. Frigga merely pitied me, like one would a flea-bitten stray mongrel, and I viewed had Sho abandoned me when I needed him most, thinking me weak and fickle." Clint furrowed his eyebrows at that. He could see Odin doing those, especially after what he did to him with the Demons and all he learned from Fancy Pants' mom. But, he couldn't comprehend Thor, Frigga, or Fancy Pants treating Loki like that, or seeing him in that way.

He didn't want Loki to stop talking though. He wanted to at least try to be a good listener.

"The scepter, when it very nearly ensnared my mind again in the basement of that tower, comforted me, and filled me with zeal and drive. Like in a children's folk tale when a magic power or destiny is bestowed upon the main character, and suddenly they are filled with a grand purpose. It is easier to align with the thought that someone sees you as special, as worthy of something spectacular."

But, that paled in comparison to what happened to Loki. The torture Loki endured seemed like something most people, well beings, couldn't make it through.

"It was obviously a lie, a lie the God of Lies believed once before. If the God of Lies, is a Lie himself, what is he really? Oh, I suppose it matters not. But know this Clint, I cannot go back to the person I used to be. He made me into a weapon, I am no longer really Loki. I'm a monster and even if his magic does lay dormant, it is due to his magic I have a mind at all." Loki leveled his green eyes at him, and the blue shards flashed to life when green magic vines snaked out from his sleeves. Clint swallowed but knew he didn't have any words to say. He couldn't refute it even if he wanted to because he didn't blame him. He thought the same when he was under the scepter's control.

"I won't be so careless with my life again, knowing what it cost me the first time. The price of turning the God of Lies into a lie himself."

"It is why Clint I must have my revenge. He stripped me of my identity. He manipulated me to breaking one of the scant few oaths I ever made without the absolute intent on breaking. He made me his puppet, and by proxy, you. And what makes it truly intolerable, absolutely disgraceful, is that he did it without being smarter than me. I am vastly more intelligent than the Other. He beat
me when I was at my lowest, when I frankly wasn't even me. He even fell for my failed invasion plans three years ago! I will feel his warm, tacky blood between the pads of my fingers. I will watch his eyes glaze over in death's embrace." Loki practically hissed, the crystal glowing a hellish crimson.

Clint thought Loki was done and opened his mouth to hopefully say something reassuring.

But he wasn't.

"I will kill him for killing me." Loki's eyes lit up an electric green. The whites of his eyes even flashed black for the smallest of instances and weirdly enough, a lightness filled Clint's chest.

He wasn't sure with Loki if he was supposed to encourage his homicidal rages, but it was better than whatever sour, depressed gloom he had slumped into. It wasn't that Clint didn't think Loki well, had good reasons to feel the way he did, it was that he just had no idea how to help him through it. Or even if he could. Or how right Loki was.

"You aren't dead Loki." Clint challenged, a thin smile slicked across his rugged jaw. No way was this troublesome firecracker anything but alive.

"Don't you dare presume to…" Loki warned suddenly, focusing on Clint.

"You're literally here talking to me." Clint deadpanned.

"You know that is not what I meant. I am not Loki, and you will never know who I truly am." Loki countered sharply, exasperated. Clint brushed off feeling mildly insulted about the jab that he would never really know Loki.

"You definitely weren't you under the scepter's influence just like I wasn't me. However, now you must be like how you used to be otherwise would Thor tell the difference." Clint reasoned, rubbing circles on Loki's knee with his thumb. He didn't plan on being that clever to think about Thor.

Loki scoffed, waving a hand. "Please. Thor, notice something that wasn't mead or a battle? Thor never even really knew the real me before. He just liked to think he did. Why exactly the oaf wises to try now is utterly vexing." Clint nearly rolled his eyes. It seemed that Loki still didn't think the best of Thor, and most likely that wouldn't change soon but…

"Fancy Pants knew the real you; you guys were literally thick as thieves. If he thought you weren't really you, I seriously would doubt he would have done any of this. And don't say he doesn't notice things, he might even notice more details than Nat. He noticed when I wanted to do archery instead of…no, not saying that." Clint stopped himself from rambling when Loki jolted from his spot on the bed to dark in front of him, both hands on Clint's knees, crystal forgotten.

Loki then planted a large, hasty, pine flavored kiss on Clint's lips. Clint reflexively returned it and tangled his fingers in Loki's long hair. Clint liked that reaction. He liked that a whole hell of a lot.

"You're…more brilliant than you look." Loki was gleaming. Positively gleaming. He had the biggest, cheekiest, most shit-eating grin on his face.

"And you're way more of an asshole than you loo…no your assholeness is always on full display. And one day you are going to tell me the truth about what happened in Asgard with Rin and Nat. I don't believe for a second you used them." Clint really did manage to sound exactly as serious as he meant to with that jab. Loki, unfazed, pushed Clint gently back onto the bed and loomed over him, teeth white, existential crisis seemingly forgotten.
"Fine. I didn't use them. My true intentions were to spare them from harm, though it was not entirely a selfless act. My version of the story is certainly valid. It felt splendid to feel so vindicated against Odin. One day, I promise I will explain the whole sad, tedious tale, but for now, let's liven the mood." Loki sounded all mischief and mayhem. Clint licked his lips in anticipation.

"Oh, Mr 'I'm dead' is going to liven the mood?" Clint smirked, hoping his humor wasn't too soon or too callous.

"I will make you regret provoking God such as I, in my domain." A switch flipped, and just like that Clint was instantly aroused. He didn't really think it would happen, the mood was pretty much decimated when they had their stupid fight but Clint wanted nothing more than to wreck Loki for thinking that about himself.

"Geez, and just when I might forget you're over the top, you go say something awful like that." Clint aimed straight for Loki's pale neck and bit and sucked at it knowing it would result in a high gasp from the God who always thought he had the upper hand.

He gripped the soft black fabric of Loki's shirt and tried something he had only seen in really cheezy pornos, he tried to tear it off of him.

"And yet you've become so forceful..." And, well really what self-respecting SHIELD agent would he be if he couldn't tear some polyester/cotton blend, right? The ripping sound of the fabric set something off in Clint, and his cock instantly twitched to attention. Maybe it was wrong of him, but he had never tried to rip the clothes off a woman before. Maybe he thought he thought it would frighten them? He didn't bother to analyze it, he was probably just as much an asshole as Loki was.

"You suck, Oh you suck….Fuck, I want you." His voice melted as he ran greedy hands over smooth, yet scar marked skin. He wondered absently if that Hakudoshi left any scars on Loki's back. Clint left harsh, sucking, biting kisses up and down the column of Loki's neck. He wondered absently if that Hakudoshi left any scars on Loki's back. He would shoot that white-haired fucker in between his eyes and turn him into magic purple sand for what he fucking did.

But he didn't really want to think about that guy right now. His mind was flooded with Loki, all cream skin, green eyes, lean legs, big cock.

"Clint, how do you want me?" Loki groaned out and Clint finally snapped a peak at Loki's bulging pants from under his torn long-sleeved shirt. He honestly wasn't sure what he wanted, but he did have a clue what he didn't want.

He knew Loki knew he didn't know, which is why he was going to try his best to surprise him.

"I want…" Loki swooped in for a sloppy, hot kiss. "I want to be in your lap. Yeah, I wanna ride you, hard." Clint wanted it, bad, but mentally winced. He didn't know how to fucking do that! Yeah, women had ridden him, and once or twice he had walked in a circus tent to seeing two guys do it, but he had never done it! He knew he should have done some research.

Now it was too late though. Loki was a mile and a half more stubborn than he was, for better or for worse and he would just have to…well, learn on the fly. Clint reached out and unbuttoned Loki's ludicrous leather pants and yanked them down to his knees. In a flash Loki had his sinful pants off his legs entirely and flipped their positions on the bed so that now Loki was laying back on it and Clint straddled him somewhat awkwardly, half on the edge of the bed, half off.

If Loki sensed his apprehension he hadn't said anything yet.
"Well, let's be on with it Clint. I told you I don't bite." Loki's eyes flashed green and Clint's shirt disappeared and reappeared hanging on a corner of a shelf. Clint then got on top of him in a rush.

"Lies. All lies, you get off on biting me." Clint grinned and went to undo his belt which then, of course, vanished and appeared again on an ancient looking chair.

"I can hardly be blamed for the sensations you cause me. If I can repay you half of the euphoria you bestow upon me, I'll be most pleased." Loki's carnivorous smirk didn't match his word choice. Clint knew even though he was going to be on top, it was Loki who was really still in control.

Clint was….pretty ok with that. He was never a massive control freak to begin with, at least he didn't thi—Clint's thoughts were slashed short by Loki grabbing his hands by his cool hands and drew him towards him.

The predatory hunger in Loki's eyes almost caused Clint to pause. Only Loki ever looked at him like this. Like he was constantly on his toes from a jaguar prowling the jungle.

"You haunt me, taunt me, and cause me much more grief than I really deserve." Clint growled out as Loki cupped his balls. On the floor vines of leaves began to curl out of Loki's ankles. Clint's balls were already firm when Loki began to roll them in his hand and ring his dick at the base.

"Oh, and what do you dese—" Clint cut Loki off with a dominating kiss. He worked his tongue deep into his mouth and had to work himself fully onto the bed and straddling Loki to do it. He barely even registered he had. Loki fought back up against him and Clint eventually rocked back up.

The taunting, blunt end of Loki's cock right between his balls and his asshole fired him up. Loki already felt hot and wet.

"I deserve to torment you." Clint grinned down. No more words were had as Loki conjured another vial in his hand and ran his hands under Clint's hamstrings, his hair prickling from the magic and anticipation. Clint opened his eyes, not even realizing he closed them, and really looked down at Loki. He wanted to really see him.

He wanted to memorize the craving, the raw desire, the messy, sweaty mass of long black hair, his sharp, straight nose, his cream skin, his broad shoulders, flat abs all flushed unevenly. Loki was just as into it as last time, but there was something definitely more raw…more soft. It wasn't as It was even better the second time, though…this time was a bit different.

"Ready to get what you deserve Clint?" Loki asked, voice smoky like a campfire. Clint just grinned back, he couldn't understand how he was able to kneel above someone as gorgeous and messy as Loki. This was just crazy.

Here went something.

Clint lined himself up, or well, so he thought, and slowly eased himself down. There was no way he could possibly look good doing this. There was no way…

He felt his asshole stretch over Loki's hot and well oiled cock. God this felt fantastic. It shouldn't, but it did.

Clint shuttered, and it had to be visible because it was then he realized Loki had used his magic on him because it didn't hurt as much as the first time. He knew there was a virginity joke embedded in there somewhere, but he just didn't care. Clint just kept slowly easing himself down, filling himself with heat and a skin crawling need for more Loki. He had to look up at the ceiling to keep
his concentration, but finally looked down at Loki between his knees.

Loki eyes were fluttering and his mouth was open in a gasp. All these curling ivy vines surrounded him like a web of leaves, or some lopsided halo.

Halo. Yeah right.

"Loki, you feel…god fuck. Hot." Clint garbled out as he still steadily slowered down Loki's long cock. How did it all fit inside him last time?

Clint wanted him all.

He wanted him to be inside him, all of him. He wanted to somehow share his skin with him. He wanted a full merge. Clint, emboldened, finally eased himself fully down on Loki's unfairly hot and twitching cock.

"Clint, you're tight. Blast you're tight. What are you doing to me?" Loki gasped out adjusting down beneath him and his thick cock inside Clint swiveled and Clint moaned. He was stretched to his limit and loved that Loki could take him to the brink of what he almost couldn't handle.

"Hopefully a whole hell of a lot." Clint moaned out like he was expelling a long dormant illness. Clint's jaw, slack and soft finally closed when he bit his lip, attempting to adjust. The smell of musk did something that really hit Clint just right.

Loki hinged forward, caressing his hands from his hips all the way up his sides leaving a trailing, heated tingle up his obliques and swooping onto his back. Loki leaned up as much as he could with upper body strength Clint had not seen from Loki. Loki planted a messy, desperate kiss right on his mouth. Clint allowed himself to greedily dissolve into the kiss, into the bond that they had. It was blazing, Loki's tongue sizzled deep into his mouth with his dick heated and throbbing inside him. He was ignited at both ends, Loki's tongue jammed into his mouth, and his dick fully up in his ass.

He wanted control, but it really seemed that Loki still had it despite his best attempt to be on top.

Clint slowly began to rise up and back down, riding Loki slow and deep. He hit his own prostate and a wave of self-indulgent pleasure rocked him. His own cock wet with precum as Loki took it and with a ring around the base of his cock, began to stroke it up and down.

"Loki slower, I don't want to cum yet." Clint warned before he realized how needy he sounded. Sweat began to run along his brow and bead across his shoulders. He could be a real sweaty bastard, but Loki didn't seem to mind, if he noticed at all. In fact, Loki's tangled hair seemed just as sweaty as his.

He had definitely seen him sweat before in the training room, but it got Clint going he could make Loki sweat like this. He grinned, only he got to run his own calloused hands over Loki's shoulders and chest. Only he got to see Loki let go, and indulge in his desires.

"You want me don't you? You ego maniac…" Clint didn't know why he said that, it just filled his chest with a humming warmth. He could always trust in Loki's desire of him.

His magic really started to unfurl now, magic alternating colors like the crystals in his room.

"Desperately." Loki gasped as Clint dropped down slowly, trying to tighten his anus as hard as he could. "Yes. I do." There was something really different about his time. Before he had thought Loki looked like a God. He still did, but now…there was something definitely more human about him. More…real. More viscerally there.
Maybe it was the smell. Loki's pine tinged musk. It smelled like a forbidden jungle and the forest behind his childhood home all at the same time.

Loki. He was in Loki's bed on who knows which planet but he never felt more at ease. Despite the impossibly luxurious sheets, the weird books, the crystals glowing like cheap UV lights in a gaudy gay bar, this felt more at home than back in Stark tower. This fit Loki. Loki, as if on que broke the kiss suddenly.

The pumping on his cock from Loki's incredibly talented hands increased and he worked his tight balls like beanbags. Clint exhaled deep, trying to think of anything to not cum immediately, but the only thing in his mind was Loki's ass and his rich, taunting laughter from his obvious reaction.

He quivered. That dark laugh, it was worth being the target of it to hear it again.

"But Clint please, faster. I want you faster." Loki broke from the kiss and hissed in his ear. The breath almost tickled. Well, wasn't he needy? Underneath Clint, Loki bucked tentatively at Clint and when Clint didn't protest (how could he?) he started to buck.

It was then it finally clicked for Clint. Loki wasn't an untouchable, unreachable God. At the same time, Loki wasn't a clumsy, fragile human. Loki was a cocktail of something he had to keep tasting. Loki was everything combined he was never taught to mix. He was a complicated combination of something Clint hadn't quite figured out.

Unlike Tony, he didn't have to figure everyone out. He could listen and absorb what was being thrown at him. He was on a level above Tony mentally. He got Loki enough, he didn't have to know or pry into all of his secrets. He could handle Loki's outbursts, Loki's plots, his schemes. Clint knew he was probably one of the only people who saw, who smelled, who dared hear Loki the way he did. Sex or not.

"Loki, I want you harder." Clint grinned and slammed down. Well, as fast and as hard as he felt Loki could handle. Or he could handle if he was really being truthful. Aaaaaannnd to be honest he was probably being a little over the top because that sort of kinda hurt. That hollow thud. But It didn't really matter. He wanted Loki, and he wanted Loki to know he could handle him.

He wasn't made of paper, but at the same time trusted Loki not to go overboard.

"How about this then?" Loki began to pump his cock harder and faster and that wasn't what Clint had in mind at all, but it felt like molten nothingness.

"Lo!" Clint panted, but Loki wasn't about to slow down, in fact more of that hot oil pooled in his hand and he ratcheted up his relentless rhythm. Loki never played fair!

"Tha…That's not wha—" Before Clint knew what hit him, Loki's thick cock his prostate just at the time that Loki brushed the vulnerable, tender head of his cock and he came hard, and again surprised all over Loki's chest, neck, and some of his hair.

Damn, did he really come so quickly again? It felt like they just started. He wanted more. He didn't want it to end yet.

"Fuck, I…" Clint, coming down off a high barely noticed when Loki helped lift him up and Loki eased out from under him.

Clint flopped back on his back on the silk sheets and Loki appeared hovering over him, tucking his sweaty hair behind his ears, face softer than he would have expected.
"I have a request Clint. An earnest one." Clint, face still slack and slightly stupid, laughed slightly when Loki's eyes darted around just like when he was nervous or caught doing something stupid. The ceiling behind him was framed with writhing, flowering vines which changed colors like led Christmas lights.

Loki definitely reminded him of Christmas, pine and all.

Clint lifted his eyebrows to prompt him to continue. It was then he noticed Loki must have magicked away the jizz out of his hair and off his chest. Perks of being a magic god.

He wished the guys in the circus had that sort of ability. The smell of their bunks!

"I want you on your knees. I wish to…have you from behind." The tone of Loki's voice made it seem like he was almost ashamed to want it, but the flush and lust brimming in Loki's glowing eyes screamed eager to rumble. It made Clint chuckle lowly.

Loki was talking as if doggie style was somehow beneath him, or he shouldn't want it for whatever reason. Clint somehow doubted Loki ever asked for it like this with his previous partners. He certainly hadn't, but then again he was pitching. They didn't have to stare longingly into each other's eyes like some honeymoon couple for sex to mean more than just sex.

"And here I thought you were going to ask me to go ass to mouth. Good to know your favors are definitely ones I can accommodate." Clint couldn't help but crack a joke at Loki's expense. Clint barked with laughter at the sheer look of horror on Loki's face.

"I cannot fathom how you'd ever think I'd ever request something so unhyg…oh I see. Having a good go at me? I shall repay it shortly." Loki darkly smirked, his eyes sparking to life like turbines in a f-16.

"Prove it Diva." Clint used his own abs, they weren't there just for show, and kissed him quick on the mouth. He barely had time to look at the snowflakes deeply carved into the headboard when he got up and turned around when he felt Loki's heavy cock at his backdoor once again.

"Tread lightly Clint. I am in an adventurous mood." Loki had folded over Clint's back and humidly whispered into his ear. Clint, not falling for it since they haven't done anything but vanilla so far, leaned into the pressure and once more his ass managed to swallow up Loki's well lubed dick.

Clint gritted his teeth. Yeah he was stretched out already, but the lube was lacking. He then felt a warmth envelope his whole body and his muscles relaxed.

"I am also in a benevolent mood, it seems." Loki's voice sounded almost sweet. Clint smiled despite himself. Loki, sweet? Really.

"Benevolent huh? Seems like that won't backfire on me in some way." Clint could only imagine the look on Loki's face as he plowed into him hard, almost causing Clint to lose his arm leverage on the bed.

"Clintt." Loki yelped out, as Clint rocked back to meet Loki full force, catching him by surprise. Clint groaned when Loki increased his pace. He began to get hard again and he knew it had to be because of Loki's magic because of course he would do that trick again.

For seconds? minutes? hours? They were just wrapped up the tide they created between each other. Clint had never done slow sex, or anything like this before. It was…new. Lances of warmth jolted up his sides and raced through his bloodstream as he tried to get in some semblance of sync to
Loki's rhythm.

He felt a little clumsy, but felt way more exhilarated. His confidence that even if he managed to do something a bit off Loki would still be somewhat turned on, ignited his chest to try harder.

"Cliiiiimnt, I…" Loki had leaned back and slapped his ass. Hard. The sting and the pleasure made it so much better. Clint knew it would leave a print, but before he could comment on it Loki managed to hit his prostate right again.

"Loki you ass." Clint moaned out and he heard Loki chuckle darkly as he did the dreaded reach around to cup his balls and begin to knead. More precum leaked out through Clint's tip and Clint hissed as Loki played with the slick liquid.

"What do you want Clint?" He heard Loki purr like a wildcat as he slapped his ass again. Fuck him.

"Ah. Loki!" Clint hissed as Loki's other hand continued to play with the tip of his penis making it oh so sensitive.

"Tell me. Clint. What do you desire?" Loki's voice quivered slightly in lust as he slammed back into him. Clint couldn't take too much more, so he rocked back into Loki hearing a gasp from the god as a reward.

"Go with what you want." Clint hissed back. "I have what I want." Clint saw grey as he rocked back into Loki. Loki's thick cock in him twitched and Clint moaned deep.

"Nines!" Loki shouted and folded over Clint again, long hair tickling Clint's back and shoulders.

"Damn….fuck this is hot." Clint's stamina had begun to finally run out as Loki erratically changed up the pace of his hand. Clint's knees began to buckle, his arms down to his elbows in a half plea to not be reduced to his face smooshed completely into the pillow.

"Lo…" With a few tired, spastic pumps, Loki spent Clint weary and euphoric onto the dark sheets. It was then Loki finally slipped out of Clint, soft and quiet. Clint flopped over to his left where Loki had collapsed, both breathing heavy, sweaty, and gazing at each other's bodies in random places.

Clint had settled his gaze on Loki's left nipple. It did have one stray dark curly hair springing out of it. Maybe he should pull it to be a dick back.

Loki brought one of his stupid long soft fingers around Clint's rough jaw bringing it up to meet his green eyes flecked blue.

"What did you mean you had what you want? I don't like to leave my sexual partners unsatisfied and if you think reaching your peak once is satisfied in my account, you are mistaken, my dear archer." Loki's feral grin reminded him all again of how jaguar-like Loki could be.

When he first hooked up with Loki he expected an arsenal of intimidating weapons masquerading as sex toys and positions that involved swings and posts.

But, what that just was, was probably considered super vanilla sex by most. They hadn't even used any toys, not counting the magic vine restraints. Consider Clint officially thrown. Clint didn't doubt Loki had more than a few secret kinks, ok, more than a few….but Clint hoped that Loki would eventually reveal that side of them, or they could talk about it. Yeah, that wouldn't be an awkward talk.
"I'm... plenty satisfied. But Loki, you can't keep asking me what I want. It's... odd, it makes me feel like I'm with like a uh... sex worker. Both of what we want matter in this. Just take the lead if you want. I trust you won't do something... crazy without first running it by me." Clint found words he didn't even know he had to voice. It was like the sentence ran wild.

"...Right. Right. It has been a while since....I've taken that into account." Loki's gaze looked far away and Clint inwardly winced. He had went and stepped on some sort of hidden mental landmine didn't he?

Clint flicked his nipple and Loki dared to look offended.

"Hey, your purple magic archer isn't going anywhere, and we got time to get all this down. Don't worry so much, ok?" Clint knew he wasn't much good at alleviating concerns, or being the best listener. He tried, but sometimes he worried he wasn't that great at picking up on underlying issues or emotions.

He was also just blissfully drowsy.

"And I you, Clint. Remember what I said, I'll be your shadow of vengeance, if you will be my light of justice." Loki sat up suddenly, but fluidly like a cat would. Loki fist his own hair back into a messy bun thing, looking down at Clint with a fondness that Clint craved, and an uneasiness that Clint didn't.

"Yeah. Yeah, sounds about right." Clint agreed. Clint finally had to trust what no one else on planet Earth could. Not Fancy Pants with his scrying, or Munchin with her little girl gazes could understand Loki the way he could.

"Now, let's wash up. We have a Titan to slay, and with my impeccable talents have managed to gather some most interesting intelligence on the current state of the Mad Titan's navy. I may just have my vengeance, and you your justice, yet." All the vines that had snaked and looped around the room disintegrated into a green mist and the crystals had ceased to glow.

A warm, inviting darkness danced in Loki's eyes as he helped Clint off the bed. Clint liked the view.

Loki wasn't some victim. Loki wasn't some white knight hero.

Loki was a man on a mission. And so was he. And Clint was a thousand percent OK with helping Loki achieve his dream.

Even.

Even if it meant no one understood either of them until all the dust settled.

Clint nodded and on second thought, grabbed Ichaival from the polished wooden floor along with his clothes.

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Chapter End Notes
It's been a long hiatus, and I am very sorry, but I'm back. After an emotionally draining and unhealthy relationship, I can finally find my fan fic legs back. Thanks to all who are still reading this and everyone who has stuck by me. If you have the time, drop me a review telling me what you think. I'm still trying to get back into my character's heads.

You are all the best! Thanks again, you are all seriously inspirational for me getting through my mental funk.

-TL
Sesshomaru and the Tangled Ties

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sesshomaru and the Tangled Ties

*(*)

Sounga.

Sesshomaru stood statue still in front of the wicked blade, slowly, vertically spinning in the brilliant, star studded abyss. His gaze never broke from the sword, but that wasn't why he planted himself like a glacier in the middle of what he now had come to somewhat understand as the Astral Plane.

He had tried to see the positions of the other vessels, however aside from the Aethon, he was unable to locate them. The Aethon stalled on the dark side of this world's only moon, perhaps with its alleged sister ship, the Nycteus. He vowed to become stronger to fully master this new skill of his.

He was within arms-reach of Sounga's hilt. The spherical pommel, which Sesshomaru had always known to be a bit odd and off-balance for a such a slender tang and blade, now made sense. It's over-sized pommel housed one half of the Soul Gem of the Greater Cosmos.

His birthright was now nothing more than a cumbersome burden. How fitting.

Sesshomaru rarely debated, but he debated here. Yet, it wasn't the power of Soul Gem that caused him to linger in inner turmoil.

"Father. Let's get out of here already. You aren't used to having your spirit leave your body yet! It's just going to be harder for you to find your body the longer you stare at this stupid, weak, blade." Bakusaiga protested petulantly and he hardened his mouth. Her palpable jealousy of his father's lauded and yet scorned sword wasn't making what he was trying to do easy.

"Bakusaiga, quiet." Sesshomaru disciplined lightly, for it was only through her guidance and the leyline that he was able to instruct Jaken on what to do to aid a most manic and crazed Loki. Sesshomaru had never seen Loki act so sporadically and with such misplaced and confused passion. Barton had indeed told the truth about the scepter; it drove Loki to madness. The scepter was a weapon indeed to be treated with vigilance.

It would be good to dispose of it altogether.

But the scepter wasn't his primary concern, nor was Hakudoshi appearing and causing Loki some amount of grief. It didn't surprise Sesshomaru in the least another Demonic Spirit had been sent to assist in the capture of the scepter. In so far, the ones that had been chosen were ones familiar to him, but not ones that he had any direct contact or conflict with. None of his father's family who he slew to keep his title of Lord, or any of countless Demons he exterminated with Loki.

It must assuredly be they were chosen in hopes they could defeat him. Since he himself had not personally sent them to the underworld, Mephisto must hope that ones that Inuyasha, or another Demon killed would have a better chance. Pure Folly.
But again. That was not his primary concern.

Sounga called to him. That was his concern.

And it was not the same sort of call that he heard from Bakusaiga, nor Tenseiga, or even Tessaiga. In fact, the calls were not from Sounga itself.

The voices were a teeming, despairing, clamoring, insisting, pleading, terrifying cacophony of shrieks, shouts, wails, and cries.

All imploring one request.

"Free us."

They even screamed his name. They sensed his presence.

If the moniker of the Soul Gem of the Greater Cosmos was accurate (which evidence had indeed been proven true through that disgraceful Mephisto's mishandling of the Meido Stone) what he heard were the souls of Demons.

These were the howls of souls of the Demons apparently sealed away in ice and snow by that disreputable Odin and his foolhardy mother five hundred or so years ago.

The souls of the frozen Demons resided in Sounga; the souls of the previously deceased Demons resided in the Meido Stone.

"Father, you cannot be possibly thinking about replacing me with that....that shifty, flimsy sword! It's probably not even sentient, and it's way creepy. I don't care what sort of gem it has in it, in no way is it better than me! You, me, and Tenseiga are the strongest being in the whole cosmos! And I'll get stronger, and so will Tensei—" Sesshomaru cut Bakusaiga off with a clawed hand. Her ramblings could not be father from what was going through his mind.

"Bakusaiga, do not entice me to put you in your true form." Sesshomaru leveled a chilling glare at Bakusaiga. He needed her silence.

"Sesshomaru!" Sesshomaru's ears pricked up instantly. He heard it. Just then. He knew that infuriating tone anywhere, and not many Demons dared to not call him by his honorific title.

Inuyasha.

It was true, all of it. Inuyasha managed to get himself sealed away yet again, this time in the blade his father fought so hard to not be a slave to. Yet again, he was being cajoled into cleaning up his family's mess. His father with his burdensome gathering of some trinket, the Soul Gem, his mother with her steering him to a destiny meant for her Eternal Demonic bloodline, and Inuyasha with his getting himself magically imprisoned again!

His birth into this family was indeed lamentable.

All of it ignited a dull, grinding fire deep in Sesshomaru's chest. Why were the fates attempting to foist this responsibility onto him? Did he somehow subconsciously guide his path towards liberating an entire race of Demons to rule them as their sovereign?

Ruling over a realm and a populous had always Loki's desire, not his.

He reached out to Sounga's hilt, what would happen if he destroyed it? He very much disliked even
the thought of being burdened with it. He cracked his knuckles to release his toxin and heard a soft sound next to him.

"Father….please….I know Sounga is older than me, and it was supposed to be your sword. I know that grandfather was feared by even the Odin for having it….but I'm…your daughter and I'll grow up and….we are supposed to be together. You, me and Tenseiga. Forever." Bakusaiga had his back to him, but he smelled the salt and heard the waiver in her voice. His head tilted to the side and he sighed softly.

"Bakusaiga. You are my one and only progeny. I will not wield Sounga, nor will I employ the skill and talent of any other Demons outside of you and Tenseiga. It is as you say: we shall slay this Titan together." Sesshomaru reassured, a touch more warmly than he intended. Bakusaiga's silver twin tails whipped around and a gleaming smile spread across her childlike face.

He brought down his hand down to the crown of her small head. It was to reassure her, and his instincts flared inside him to not destroy the sword.

"Yeah, of course I'm right! This titan doesn't stand a chance! Nyah, Nyah, Sounga take that! We don't need you or your stupid, weirdo powers." Bakusaiga punched her small fist in the air and jumped in victory. He had forgotten how pup's emotions could sway from one extreme to another so quickly. He inwardly smiled, though she physically resembled him almost exactly, in very little way was she alike him in temperament. That was most likely a fortunate thing.

Tenseiga at his hip thrummed with contentment. He apparently struggled with appearing on the Astral Plane and would need training to become stronger to so do.

"But then…why are you still here bothering with this second-rate sword when you could be training..." Bakusaiga sighed, hearing Tenseiga. "Geez Tenseiga when did you turn into such a sap?! If you want to tell my father to see his intended go ahead, but count me out." Bakusaiga glared at Tenseiga who simply pulsed a blue wave back at her.

'Telling Bakusaiga about the souls will change nothing as of this moment. Something is telling me this will not be the last time I will have to deal with Sounga. And even as I wish it not true, something within me beckons that leaving Sounga here indefinitely leaves much undone and much potentially to chance. Even if I didn't set any of this into motion, perhaps it would be wise to finish it.' Sesshomaru's mouth hardened as he took one last look at the sword before turning his back on it.

He had other, more urgent matters to attend to. If Inuyasha and the other Demons had been frozen for this long, then surely they could wait until he cleaved the head off that Titan. Or they could wait even longer, he was no servant to their pleas.

The most urgent matter was to have his way with every inch of Stark to dissuade another to ever think of touching his intended again. He could converse with Loki about the impending armada later.

"Let's return." Sesshomaru glanced down at a placated Bakusaiga who was positively alit with energy. The white leyline on her left arm glowed as she took both her hands and grabbed Sesshomaru's left and swung up.

In a flash of darting stars he streaked back to where his physical body had laid, yet in the process he heard a dark, rumble.

"Sesshomaru, you cowardly bastard!" He definitely heard those words. 'Inuyasha has always been
impatient. He would have to simply wait till I figure out what to do with yet another mess my family has thrust upon me.' Sesshomaru frowned.

Sesshomaru's skin shone with a sheen of sweat in the bright spotlights of the well maintained grass he had been practicing his katas on. This strange amphitheater was bereft of any humans and large enough for him to practice his katas bounding up and across various benches and seats as well as containing Bakusaiga's slowly steadying youki.

His training with Bakusaiga had indeed come a long way since he first summoned her, but he still had much to achieve.

Chest heaving from exertion, he glanced straight up at the overcast night sky.

Not a portal to the Astral Plane in sight.

He had unintentionally summoned a small, muddled one when Fury had provoked him, but despite his hours of training in the amphitheater, he had yet to recreate it. Not even a blip of the power manifested, and he was now supposed to have ample power to harness and bend to his will!

Confounding.

His mother, much weaker of a Demon than he, had managed to perform intricate techniques such as her Astral Bind and Astral Lagoon, yet he couldn't even get a small window to appear. How bothersome. At least her spirit now had come to be silenced and she no longer could pester him.

He heard Stark's propulsion suit approach. He had indeed informed Stark of his whereabouts, and that he had to come here to train. Stark could not accuse him of running away or fleeing, even though he never ran from anything or anyone.

Sesshomaru sheathed Bakusaiga as Stark's suit flamed across the deep night sky and landed with a solid thud in front of him.

He remembered vaguely how Stark looked when he awoke from his scry to Jaken.

Sesshomaru's eyes flashed open, almost as if he had been asleep and awoke suddenly. He didn't even have the chance to straighten himself before Stark darted in front of him and grabbed his left shoulder and the right side of his face tilting it up slightly to meet his. His hand was shaking slightly.

"You're such a pain in the ass. Do you know what you put me through? Toady, Reindeer Games, and the rest of Captain Communism's team have been back for forty-three minutes and you were just still slumped here like you ran out of batteries or something!" Stark's brown eyes, usually confident, or angry brimmed with an emotion that he had not truly seen before. Worry.

A warmth pooled in Sesshomaru's chest. His intended cared for his well-being, and it had nothing to do with him defending or protecting anything because he truly did nothing at all. He cared for him. He saw him.

Another emotion darkened his ribs inward, Sesshomaru had not intended to have left his physical
body for that extended length of time and worry his intended so. Though Sesshomaru guessed Stark's intellect had known he would eventually return, it seemed his emotions overrode this. Sesshomaru decided to believe that Stark didn't in fact underestimate him, and instead this wasn't a reaction based solely in logic.

They were alone in Stark's quarters. He was in the red chair in the corner which struck Sesshomaru as odd since he was most certainly not in Stark's quarters when he scryed. Did Stark move him?

"This Sesshomaru was unaware that time spent on the Astral Plane flows more rapidly than here. I had not meant to...." He paused and his eyes widened and his body went rigid. Liability. Could he have been a liability when his physical form was incapacitated? Did something occur?

Stark's lips met his needily, hotly, but not harshly.

"Well, you're certainly better than Point Break and his trips in Asgard, he has absolutely no concept of time. And you can ask Pep, I have no leg to stand on when it comes to punctuality." Stark leaned back and Sesshomaru had half a mind to growl and throw the human into his quarters and remind him that the other humans that littered this earth had nothing on him.

Poof.

"Grand. Your Astral Spirit is finally back in your physical body. Indeed your trip to see your grating mother had paid off." Sesshomaru smelled Loki's magic behind him and the palpable frustration wafted off Stark in waves. Something was amiss. Sesshomaru smoothly rose to a standing position as Stark's worn, warm hands slid off him. Loki was pacing about again, and how he loathed that.

"I managed to glean much information from her, despite some difficulty." Sesshomaru leveled a calculating stare at Loki. He was hiding something. Sesshomaru lamented that as well. While he was guiding Jaken he could not make out much of his exchange with Hakudoshi. It most likely had something to do with their exchange and any spawn of Naraku could not be trusted unless they had something to gain from it. He probably spouted some nonsense to Loki to cause him to overthink something, again.

"Well then, hopefully you can assist in destroying the scepter that should have been disposed of three Midgardian years ago. It is a weapon that surely serves no purpose in this realm, or any for that matter." Loki's hands fidgeted and motioned towards the main living quarters. So that was it. He wanted the scepter gone and he couldn't do it himself.

Just then Rin rushed in.

"Lord Sesshomaru! You're up! Rin ate some more pizza, it had pepperoni on it, but Storm God isn't here, so I ate what Barton ate! I put the flowers in a cup Banner gave me. Well, all except one, Fury looked like he wanted one. He was really annoyed he had to ask for help! Can we visit Polly again tomorrow?" Rin greeted him as usual and Sesshomaru relaxed some in relief that she had been properly cared of.

Sesshomaru nodded, noting he did smell Fury's faded presence. It was inopportune he was on the Astral Plane when he visited. He would have liked to torture that particular human a bit.

"I still think we could get more information from it, but why listen to the genius inventor and by some, blacksmith. With the containment field we would have time to study it and figure out the Other's magic signature." Stark pondered as they made their way out of Stark's quarters.
Sesshomaru's arm began to throb, ache, then positively jolt in pain. Sesshomaru fought the red pooling at his eyes and his fangs lengthening, but just barely.

The pain crept quickly like serpents, or wires up his shoulder, his neck and pricked the back of his head. Rin looked up to him, curiously.

His vision began to darken at the edges and Tenseiga and Bakusaiga both began to protest and hum.

It was when they entered the main living quarters to reveal Jaken perched on the sofa with the scepter firmly in his grasp did Sesshomaru understand exactly what his mother meant when he had been marked by the other. He knew at some base instinctual level he could not get any closer to the scepter, in Jaken's grasp or not, without some dire consequences.

"We've tried everything, and I mean everything, to destroy this thing, Bruce's ideas, my shield. Even Natasha's weapons. Nothing can even nick it. Thor is still off in England, we thought maybe..." Rogers' trailed off, arms crossed almost sheepishly and Sesshomaru used every ounce of willpower in him to not reveal any of the pain racking through his body.

"Mjolnir would be most ineffective against it being made of uru. It would absorb the magic, making matters worse. Sesshomaru's Bakusaiga is the only one capable of fully obliterating the Other's magicked weapons." Loki bit out, and it sounded from Sesshomaru's perspective not the first time he explained it.

Sesshomaru cut his eyes over to Barton, he looked upon him in apprehension. Of course. His mother revealed to him as well that he could not destroy the Other's magic without further training. He would prove Barton wrong. He went to unsheathe Bakusaiga but found his arm's nerves jolting with crisp, lancing pain. It was as if his body was being shackled, or prohibited to be used.

"Well Pretty Boy, let's be on with it. Despite what Tony says, I agree with Glow Stick and think this is best disposed of. Discreetly if possible, so maybe tone down the death ray or you might fry Frogger. We do owe him one." Romanoff had a slight smile on her face, and looked healthy enough after surviving Hakudoshi's miasma. He had saved Inuyasha's annoying companions from Mukotsu's miasma before and they had not looked so lively after.

They all had their eyes on them.

Sesshomaru fought the lava hot wires cramping his muscles to grasp Bakusaiga's hilt.

As soon as he did, a thunderbolt of agony fired through him and Tenseiga hummed to allay some of the pain. Using Tenseiga's momentary relief he pulled on Bakusaiga's hilt from her scabbard.

"Lord Sesshomaru?" Rin tilted her head to the side, eyebrows furrowed. Bakusaiga wouldn't budge.

So. This was how it was to be. Together, currently, they were not strong enough to overcome the Other's curse. He couldn't have any of the others, especially Stark, know that he was afflicted with an inability to destroy a mere toy of their foe.

"This Sesshomaru does no one's dirty work. If you wish the destruction of this wand, find your own methods. I have other urgent training to attend to in the sporting amphitheater. Rin, behave, I will be back soon." Sesshomaru turned around quickly and left the living quarters. He heard Stark behind him huff.
"So, how's batting practice going?" Stark, fully armored, questioned and Sesshomaru crossed over to him. He was in a way relieved to see Stark, and in a way, cautious. His voice held that had that certain cadence and tenor to it that displayed he knew something that he couldn't wait to reveal.

"..." Sesshomaru opted to not respond initially, it obviously was not going as well as expected.

"I figured it out." Stark led and Sesshomaru's ears lifted. So, he and Jaken were successful.

"The containment field is stable? Impressive. I will reward Jaken for this achievement." Sesshomaru began to think of what Jaken would prefer most. More meat? He did lose those ear devices of his to Barton in that archery wager....

"Well, that yeah. But I already knew how to do that. I figured out why you didn't destroy the scepter from the get-go." Stark paused for effect and Sesshomaru's knuckles cracked and his spine stiffened. A shimmer of youki shot out from his feet unintentionally.

He couldn't know. Barton wouldn't have said anything, of that he was most certain. He trusted the human to not reveal his weaknesses.

"Rin's concern caused Nat to remember something from her study abroad trip to Asgard. Something that apparently Bambi forgot, or just thought wasn't high priority enough to tell us. His mother, Frigga, the smart one of the family, mentioned you may have been cursed. That and Loki going full-tilt big diva brother on you during crabocalypse for being seen by the Other... let's say we put two and two together. The Other, that freakshow sorcerer, did some big bad voodoo to you." Stark had suddenly become too close to Sesshomaru for his liking but dared not move. He stood frozen, just like he had in front of Sounga. He didn't dare blink nor breathe.

Liability. Who else knew? Would Loki remember and nag him until the end of the cosmos? Would their captain worry needlessly more? Would Stark still trust him to protect him and his fortress from harm?

'Perhaps not. I cannot even destroy one gaudy artifact. I forced my mate to house a weapon of unknown origin and power in his fortress.' Sesshomaru's ears flattened against his head, but nothing else betrayed his turbulent thoughts.

"You wanted to destroy it, but you couldn't, right?" Stark's voice got softer as he lifted the mask on his face, not accusing or triumphant as he usually would be in unravelling a mystery or solving a puzzle. Sesshomaru still didn't dare move, aside from the breeze toying with this long hair. He couldn't lie to Stark, but he was unsure how to articulate himself.

So instead, slowly and fluidly, he lifted his left arm and pushed down his yukata sleeve, revealing what he had been unable to properly heal. Well, it at least he had managed to staunch the bleeding and the mend the blistering.

The welted burn 'The Other', raised pink and rough, stood out against his usually pale skin. Stark would have seen it eventually if they had coupled, it was another reason he sought to train was to heal it anew, but it was a far slower process than anticipated. Not even Tenseiga could assist him, and he knew he wanted to.

"...." Stark wordlessly took his wrist and looked at his upper underarm.

Sesshomaru attempted to smell the emotions coming off Stark but his suit always made it more difficult. The soot smell always overtook it and he couldn't get a good bearing on what to expect
from him.


Sesshomaru ears lowered some. Stark still remained silent, studying the mark and absently tracing his wrist marking with his armored thumb.

"Of all the fucking nerve…Does it hurt?" Stark sounded miles away, as if he wasn't saying what was truly on his mind.

"…" Sesshomaru opted for silence again. It burned and stung yes, but he figured it would until he was either strong enough to overcome this bothersome hindrance or Loki slew the Other. He obviously preferred the former to occur first, Loki was known to drawing out a kill.

"OK, question game. Again. Three for three." Stark finally brought his eyes up from the scrawl in on his arm to his eyes. His brown eyes were tempests on the sea.

Rage. Was it directed at the Other or himself for succumbing to such a ploy?

"…I acquiesce." Sesshomaru still let Stark rub his crimson wrist marking with his armored hand, it… was pleasant in a…foreign way. His youki buzzed through his veins, it wasn't the typical feeling of lust, or distant anxiety Stark put into the gesture.

Was Stark trying to comfort him? Comfort him, the Lord of the Western Lands, the strongest of the Demons? As if he would entertain such a notion over such a trivial matter!

Sesshomaru fought a snarl, but didn't yank his wrist back because it was then Stark spoke up.

"First thing's first, I'm gonna try my hand at healing this, Cuz seeing this on you really, really pisses me off." Stark's voice rolled out like rocks down a mountainside. The rest of his helmet collapsed away.

Sesshomaru continued to stand stock still. For some unfathomable reason he couldn't name, he felt apprehensive to move. As if he did move Stark would act out in some way he couldn't predict.

Stark took his other armored hand and the glowing youki flowed from his hand and onto the brand. It really should have occurred to him sooner that he had begun the mating process with Stark. If humans in this time didn't know of Demons, then they certainly wouldn't know of mating.

Sesshomaru slowly eased out a breath he had been holding in through his nose.

Slowly, gradually, the mark lost most of its discoloration and seeped back into the smooth underarm skin. Even the jagged pain subdued down to a far more tolerable scraping itch.

It wasn't fully gone, Sesshomaru suspected a trace would remain, but his ears went up regardless.

"Not a home run, but I'll take the infield double." Stark sighed out, his expressive mouth twisting into a frown. "First question, do you know what this curse does?" Stark asked, rubbing the back of his neck. He did that when he was uncomfortable.

"… as I understand it, I am unable to destroy the Other's magic, lest…something inconvenient would occur." Sesshomaru explained to the best of his ability, then thought he should elaborate. "This Sesshomaru can overcome this curse with further training. I will expel his presence from my person." Sesshomaru cut the most convincing look into Stark's eyes. Stark's face remaining grim and dark, didn't lighten by much.
"So that's why you're here exhausting yourself after already a shit day instead of lying in between my silk sheets." Stark grinned. It didn't quite reach his eyes but it pleased him. Sesshomaru eyes gleamed at him and he flashed a quick fang.

"Clint filled me in on some of what your mother said to you, that the rest of your race was sealed away by Odin and that she wanted you to rule them. You also said earlier your father wanted you to be perfect and to rule his lands or whatever. What do you want?" Stark continued seriously and a touch foreboding. He hadn't expected that question. Just what did Barton tell Stark? Surely Stark wouldn't have gone and shared this information with Loki. No. If he had, Loki would thrown another tantrum he'd have to listen to.

'Strange. Barton had asked me the same question in the Quinjet. Even Polly had asked me if I wanted friends in this realm or not. I have never had anyone truly ask me this, not even Loki.' Sesshomaru sliced his gaze through Stark and he stared back, unaffected.

"I wish…" Sesshomaru hesitated, unsure of what he wanted in which order. He was shy of mating age, but he had unintentionally initiated it anyway. How puzzling when he now truly thought about it. He was not due to be ready to mate for another Demon year, but he was mating with a human, not a Demon. "I wish to battle the most powerful beings, including our foe, and protect what is mine. Then…" He hesitated again. Why? Was he this wary of Stark's reaction? This Sesshomaru feared no such thing.

"Then…" Stark prompted, impatient.

"This Sesshomaru has…begun a mating ritual with you. It is why my markings have shifted their color from magenta to crimson. I wish to complete it and be your mate." Sesshomaru knew his voiced sounded a touch hard and a little low, but he didn't dare break eye contact with Stark. If he were to be honest with himself, it was precisely what he wanted. He didn't yearn any longer to return to his lands to stay, though he would have to return to visit. Much was left incomplete when Loki spirited him away.

He also had to retrieve Ah-Un. He had to ensure Prince Kouga was adjusting to his new role as Lord of the Western lands.

It was peculiar to think he would no longer be a Lord. Peculiar he had a difficult time imagining himself without his title even though he didn't particularly enjoy its responsibilities in the first place.

Stark laughed heartily, his expressive mouth opening into a wide smile.

"I gotta say, 4/10 proposal score. No flowery speech about how great, amazing, and handsome I am, or how we make a great team or some typical 'be my partner in crime' monologue. I will say the whole Yankee Stadium lit up at night thing is a good touch for ambiance. But no rock? You lose technical points on that one. What's a guy supposed to show off at Sunday brunch, or on Instagram?" Stark chuckled, and Sesshomaru's ears went up. Proposal! And what was this rock? Did he wish for a crystal? Why?

Sesshomaru had understood mating rituals between Demons as a thoroughly mutual affair. Their markings changed color, and in rare occasions morphed or changed shape to reflect their partner. Of course with humans they had no markings, so there was no discernible way to see if the mating ritual was actually mutual with Stark. Sesshomaru had already had his doubts of Stark's fidelity, though it seemed like he had the chance to couple with a human, but decided against it.

He had thought that meant Stark reciprocated his intentions. Was he wrong again? He grew tired of
these games. He never liked doubt and he wanted answers, but he doubted that Stark would be direct with him. Sesshomaru's ears flattened against his head; maybe Stark was indeed mocking him.

Sesshomaru allowed his eyes to close. He had to have initiated a mating ritual with the most infernal human to ever—

The warmth of Stark's lips capturing his shocked his eyes open. His mouth always tasted like electricity and the urgency of his kiss surprised him. Sesshomaru reciprocated, he wanted to devour Stark for making him this soft, this unsure, this consistently exposed.

A wave of sudden frustration surged through him, pushing his tongue into Stark's mouth, thrashing it and kneading his lips onto his. His facial hair scratched his face but he didn't care as he took the back of Stark's head, bringing him up and closer. He carefully raked his claws down the back of his neck until he reached the metal of his suit.

They broke apart a little breathlessly.

"I think now is the time you ask your first question." Stark's eyes positively danced. Sesshomaru sighed. He was going to make him ask?

"Do you accept my offer Stark, to mate with me?" Sesshomaru scorched his gaze into Stark's. He didn't feel exposed at the moment, instead he felt determined. This would finally clear everything up.

He stood straight as the arrow he shot from the bow not days earlier.

"You have to know by now I never do anything half-assed, and I know you don't either. I'm in. Shhhhhhhoooooooooooooo I never thought this would happen. Yeah." Stark smirked and let loose a deep breath, fussing with fur his pelt left on his armor.

"...I as well." Sesshomaru admitted lightly. He never thought he would take a mate, let alone a human. He had thought a mate would just hold him back, or want his lands, or acclaim. But Stark wanted him, not what he possessed.

"Good, you've stopped with that 'this Sesshomaru' nonsense you only do when you're pissy, nervous, or possibly hormonal. Weeks ago we didn't even know you guys existed, and so I do like being the first to do something." Stark raised his eyebrows suggestively and Sesshomaru frowned. He was not some conquest, but he sensed only humor from Stark, not condescension.

"Horns mentioned the whole mating thing. It's nothing Tony Stark can't handle. I even told Rhodey we were in a relationship, so that would have been awkward if we weren't on the same page....I draw the lines at blood vials though, Angelina Jolie and Billy Bob sorta already did that and I think Steve might not come to the wedding if there really was a séance. " Stark said laughing, happy.

Stark even smelled relieved. He didn't know exactly what he meant by those names however. And wedding? That was a human ritual. Sesshomaru wasn't enthusiastic about participating in such a...ceremony. He didn't even want to think about how the custom had changed since his time.

"You won't regret staying, you know." Stark's voice changed pitch. It was supposed to sound arrogant, but he smelled anxiety.

"I have, in the past, made some missteps. Promising to stay in this realm with you is not among them." Sesshomaru's gaze burned into Stark and Stark cleared his throat and cheeks flushed a shade usually reserved during their couplings. His face, for a human, was very entertaining in how lively
he expressed his emotions.

Sesshomaru would count Stark's reaction as a slight win.

"Ok, last question, we all saw Jaken's true form, yet another bet I lost. Damn Reindeer Games is pretty stoked about that one bet. Can you show me yours? Tell me you're bigger than Clifford, and please tell me you're fluffy like that stupid pelt. I have a bet going with Natasha, she thinks your're short-haired, like some doberman or something. I'm thinking like, big fluffy husky." Stark asked and Sesshomaru stiffened a bit, he didn't really understand what he was talking about.

"Oh. Yeah, I don't think those breeds were in Japan at that time...but eh. Closest without going over." Stark continued, he must have sensed his confusion. He didn't particularly care what Barton thought of his true form, though he was pleased he didn't attack him.

Though, if his mate couldn't stay composed saying his true form, then he wasn't worthy. It would be a test of sorts. Still, he wondered why Stark was suddenly so interested in his form. He also didn't know if this amphitheater would properly conceal his form or not, however he did decide to play the game with Stark.

Sesshomaru took his arm back from Stark's grasp.

"It'd be best if you donned your helmet, Stark, the wind here is not favorable for my toxin."

Sesshomaru warned and his eyes bled red and his youki sparked red and swirled around him. His mouth split wide and his facial markings bled together and his ears morphed long along with his face and his pelt fluffed out and unfurled around him and before he knew it he was on all fours.

Sesshomaru barked and showed his teeth and curled his tail around him, straightening up. His ears up, awaiting Stark's reaction. He tried his best to staunch the toxic miasma that naturally accompanied his form better than he thought. Hardly any mist leached through his fangs. His fur billowed out all around him and he dug his claws into the neat, trimmed grass. He fought the insatiable urge to roll about in it.

Stark boosted his suit up to about his eye level.

"Holy shit, I'll be damned. You defy every law of physics I've ever known. Is this who you really are? Does this mean every position is doggy style?" Stark rambled and Sesshomaru, to his credit really did try to focus on what his intended mate was saying, but in this form he didn't really comprehend it fully. Much like when Loki creature shifted, his mind became muddled by his canine instincts. It is why Loki didn't creature shift in battle, and he himself transform as a last resort.

So when he cocked his head to the side and pricked up his ears, Stark must have laughed because he realized he didn't quite understand.

Sesshomaru barked at him again and swept his tail from side to side, barely missing the seats behind him.

"Bruce has got to be kicking himself now. I remember him saying you had no idea what it was like to transform into something. You're terrific, in both senses of the word. I mean, this explains the pelt deal. Christ, I called it at Husky...and Jaken said you aren't even fully grown, you're enormous. How your joints aren't compressed under your weight is beyond me." Sesshomaru ears lowered some and he growled despite himself. Jaken would go and mouth off over things about his person. He didn't need him gossiping about him, even if it was something that seemed to come naturally.
"Whoa, didn't mean anything by it, please don't make me a chew toy." Stark meant this humorously, Sesshomaru was almost certain of this. He didn't eat humans, and he vaguely remembered promising that. He had enough being a bit of a spectacle, and he suddenly had the incredible urge to take the sky and bound away from this stinking metropolis. His senses were all on high alert.

Running about in this form would be unwise. He decided to transform into his typical humanoid form. He slowly glowed and for the second time that day took to his light form. He paused in his transformation and instead chose to play with Stark a bit.

He circled Stark twice then shot as a streaming, luminous light and shot to the south.

And in predictable fashion Stark gave chase. His suit was indeed swift, he caught up to him in no time. Sesshomaru was unsure if he or Stark would be faster, but the competition of speed wasn't why he was doing this.

A small smile tugged at the corners of his illuminated, semi formed mouth. He soared past the tall skyscraper he favored, which actually had the name of Chrysler, a moniker of someone who apparently made the vehicles he loathed so. Maybe he would cease to sit upon it.

"….you can't play hard to get after you propose. That's not how this works." He heard Stark and he merely picked up his pace. He could tell Stark had been intrigued by his flight ability and he supposed that now would be a good time to show him each of his forms.

He zagged quick to the right and swooped down at a steep, almost vertical angle low through one of the human streets, sparkling just over their vehicles he despised. He smelled that Stark was still hot on his crackling, bright trail.

"I guess you can't say anything while you're in tinkerbell form, but I bet you're having fun." Stark laughed again, and Sesshomaru simply sped up, looping over a red and green light signal. A smirk played on his features.

It had been decades, maybe even a full century since he had raced with someone that was both enjoyable and a challenge. Well, he supposed he had raced the metal dragons, but this was different. This mattered more. He could go full tilt speed with Stark and he could keep up. He knew not a single Demon in his time who could, aside from that one Phoenix Demon, Suzaku, he once slew, and his sister, Suzuka, the one who tormented Loki so.

He didn't count Kouga when he has those jewel shards, that wasn't his own prowess.

He pushed his limit, and like a comet he skimmed the surface of the water where he last sunk the vessel. He smelled the soot and fire of Stark's suit behind him and heard the continuous splash of seawater.

"….This beats Monaco. Well, at least before the whole Ivan Vanko part. I know this had to be better than the salt flats. Horns told me you wanted me to go with you, did you have this in mind? Flying there together like this?" Stark challenged as he came up beside him. So, Stark seemed envious of Barton's and his trek to his mother's tomb, did he? Unreasonable human. He had that in mind, in a way. He wasn't planning on flying initially but the more he thought about it, maybe he would have been impulsed to do so.

He spiraled up and around the giant green statue of which he still had not figured out the significance of, and doubled backed to the city.
He was indeed having fun. Sesshomaru smiled softly and the light of his youki shimmered brighter, like a thunder Demon's ultimate attack.

Tenseiga hummed all alongside him and surprisingly he even heard a warble of something from Bakusaiga. So, she wasn't completely dissatisfied.

Sesshomaru glanced to his left, and saw Stark match his pace, blue afterburners sparking with his own youki.

"You. Me. My sheets. Now." Stark announced and Sesshomaru smiled all the way to the back to his tower. Sesshomaru sparked his radiant youki faster. Usually he would be quite drained, but connecting with Stark had replenished some of his reserves. Perhaps it was the healing of his curse mark? Perhaps it was something more.

Sesshomaru had anticipated and he dared looked forward to this. They had never coupled in Stark's quarters before and they knew they would be uninterrupted he felt Loki's magic signature vanish while he was sparring. Loki may have magicked away Barton to another realm, for he was always able to feel his presence and priest presences if they were near. He knew Loki was emotional and needed support, and Barton would be more than suitable to provide it.

When they landed on the roof of the tower Sesshomaru smelled for Rin. It was not too late but with all the going's on...

"Don't worry, Jaken put Little Miss Sunshine to bed. I haven't heard a peep out of Loki either and the rest are on different levels." It was then Sesshomaru noticed something important.

"You are referring to Jaken by his name." Sesshomaru levelled curiously. Stark ran a hand on the back of his neck.

"Yeah, well, he proved himself useful. Gotta hand it to the green guys of the Avengers, they're full of surprises." Sesshomaru raised his eyebrows. So, he thought of Jaken as one of his comrades? How unexpected.

"And yet you referred to me as….tinkerbell….I have a feeling that is yet another reference I am unfamiliar with. Is she too another yellow haired woman drawn in your time?" Sesshomaru, half serious crossed the small distance between them as Stark's armor disassembled.

"I actually didn't mean for that to happen. Coincidence! I swear on Dum-e." Stark swallowed and grinned.

"I will have to punish you for this offense. You refer to Jaken by his name, but your intended as various fictional blonde women…unacceptable." Sesshomaru maintained his impassive features as he ran the backs of his claws down the side of Stark's neck. His ears were up in mirth however and Stark caught it. He could be exceptionally efficient at reading his intentions.

"Does this punishment involve the whip becau—" Sesshomaru answered Stark's question by looping his whip of light around his wrists. "You know you never did use your other two questions from our game." Sesshomaru cocked his head to the side and flashed a fang.

"I lack a pertinent question." Sesshomaru indeed had some questions, but they could wait for later. Like, what exactly were the terms of the bet he made with Loki? Something told Sesshomaru it would be something of great mischief. But that didn't matter now.

He slung Stark, still tied up, over his shoulder.
"Hey! I'm not a sack of potatoes, or goat heads or whatever you're used to carrying. Well, at least I can't complain about the view." Sesshomaru ignored Starks futile protests as he left Tenseiga and Bakusaiga us outside Starks quarters. entered his chambers.

He threw Stark on his own bed, enjoying watching him bounce off the creaking mattress. He was going to ravish him.

"I want you, like yesterday. Don't keep me waiting gorgeous." Sesshomaru, again, ignored his demand. He was going to decide when and how he'd behave.

He glanced around the room and looped his whip around the frame of his bed, securing him there.

"Oh so that's how this is going to be. OK my safe word is 'language'." Sesshomaru withdrew his pelt and armor and looked down at Stark, expectant, aroused, and curious on his bed.

Sesshomaru relinquished the end of his whip and with maximum agility he shredded the shirt off Stark and tore the button off Stark pants.

"If you are to be my intended, only I will be intimate with you. Unlike other Demons I will not tolerate polyamory. This is not up for debate. Can you abide by these terms?" Sesshomaru's placid yet stern voice blanketed the room. 'A fickle harlot' Loki referred to him as, and Romanoff definitely agreed with that assessment of his character. He would somehow convince this human that he was more than enough. That there was no need to stray, he could and would satisfy...no. More than satisfy him. He would make him unspool, loose and unbound, warm and undone at his feet. He would make him understand that there was no one else like him, no one else that could ever desire him as much as he does.

He unintentionally dropped the temperature in the room. As a result, Starks nipples went pert.

"I think you did just voice a pertinent question and yeah, as long as it's the same for you. Against everything I wanted to believe about myself, I'm pretty possessive of you. Thinking you were banging Clint, wearing his stupid ugly clothes....it....it was like pumping my veins with jet fuel. Your hair in his bed before mine...." Stark revealed darkly and Sesshomaru's ears pricked up and his eyes went wide.

The four lands?! Barton? His hair?

'That explains the previous morning when I resembled a human and he refused to tell me what he wanted ask me. That explains his unfounded jealousy. That clarifies why he returned intoxicated and smelling of another, female human. He had thought I had strayed from our arrangement with the archer. I had been in Barton's quarters. I had allowed him to touch me when we practiced archery. Archery. Stark had been irate then as well, and not at that hanging sack that Jaken destroyed. He had been angry that I had been too close to Barton. He was hurt over my apparent infidelity yet chose not to confront me about it.' Sesshomaru reached a belated epiphany. He would most certainly correct Stark's hasty assumption.

Sesshomaru pounced on the bed and tore off the rest of Stark's clothes, eyes glittering in revelation.

"Humans have always been so foolish. I only desire you. Barton is but a platonic relation and furthermore I'd never try to seduce a mortal Loki covets so. You are and will be the only human this Sesshomaru has given himself to." Sesshomaru lengthened his fangs and ran them down Stark's neck to his clavicle, sucking the flesh there. He smelled a different emotion on Stark's skin. Relief? Solace?
"Yeah, whatever. I get the bro code now...geez you're a damn tease." Sesshomaru continued to travel down Stark's toned torso, nipping here and there. He left slight goosebumps on Stark's skin where his tongue slid down. Stark was especially responsive this evening.

He was enjoying this. He was enjoying exploring his skin, the way it smelled like spice, the way he tasted like electricity. He was enjoying mapping out Stark's body with his tongue.

"I want to blow you." Stark voiced, voice husky and full of desire and need. This caught Sesshomaru's attention. Perhaps he'd grant his request, but he wanted to take his time. He raised his head to meet Stark's eyes and began to shed his clothes. He then realized Stark still had on his shoes and sliced through the laces to remove them. Stark rolled his eyes but he could tell he didn't particularly care.

"Prove it." Sesshomaru murmured and his eyes lit up as he straddled a now semi-hard Stark and dove upon his mouth with his own, claiming it. He had wanted Stark to know that their coupling was no mere dalliance. This was a bond now and he was to be treated a more than a mere tryst.

Stark's torso bucked up and his wrists wriggled. Sesshomaru hungered for Stark and cupped the side of his face while grazing his talons down his opposite side. Stark shivered and Sesshomaru rumbled a deep growl through his chest as he finished the kiss and lifted back up. Stark glared, flushed and desperate beneath him. His muscles flexed and his arc reactor gleamed an icy blue that casted shadows around his face. He was breathtaking, and the inventor wanted him. Stark caused his entire nervous system to flood with youki and his own cock wet.

"Give it to me." Stark demanded, but it also sounded a touch like a plea. Stark wanted to be submissive. He would grant that. He didn't just want someone to overpower him, he wanted him in particular to overpower him. And he could. And he would. Over and over if necessary.

Sesshomaru flashed his fangs and instead began to suck and knead Stark's neck eliciting gasps and curses. He showed him his true form, he could show him exactly who he was mating with. The pinnacle of Demonic power.

"Please damn it, you're torturing me here. You can't tie me up and expe—" Sesshomaru, quick as an Eagle Demon thrust his body up and presented the tip of his length to Stark's open mouth. It was already oozing because he eager to see just how much Stark wanted to taste him.

"About time you shut me up. I'll sign the number three if you're too greedy and I need air." Stark winked and Sesshomaru rocked his hips forward and he sharply inhaled as he entered Stark's hot, spicy mouth. He was unlike any other physical conquest he has ever experienced before but he couldn't quite place why. It was as if Stark could swallow him whole, soul and all.

Sesshomaru continued to push slowly into Stark's emploring mouth, angling to achieve the most of him entering Stark as possible. Stark sucked him down like a twister and Sesshomaru yipped, biting his own lip. It drew blood.

He could smell the fluid building on Stark's own cock and knew that he was enjoying being owned as much as he enjoyed owning him.

Sesshomaru shoved all the way in, Stark protests came as a muffled grunt, mouth full of him. He pulled out slowly and Stark made sure he sucked the whole way. Sesshomaru knees weakened as he pulled all the way out and Stark flicked the tip of his cock with his tongue.

"I can take more than that, I thought you wanted to punish me, not fee—" Stark taunted and Sesshomaru knew a challenge when he heard one.
He smirked and slung himself fully inside his hot wet mouth, earning a muffled response.

"You will take, what I bestow upon you." Sesshomaru continuously rocked back and thrust forward into Stark's mouth, his hands opening and fistng with each hard, deep thrust. If he was to be his mate, he would take this. Stark hummed his lips and the vibrations caused him to shudder and his balls to tighten. Stark was talented, skilled, it almost ached it felt so good.

His youki began to seep out and flood the floor, and his marking began to morph and dance.

He pounded harder into Stark's mouth, over and over. The back of Stark's head hitting the pillow which echoed against the headboard. Sesshomaru let out a low, growling moan.

Stark muffled something and Sesshomaru retracted out on instinct. He didn't want to hurt him, truly. Stark sputtered a bit as he retreated back farther down his torso.

Their eyes locked and Sesshomaru saw it. It was the same look Stark gave him when they were in his laboratory and he called him his anomaly. He truly saw him, he wanted him. He withdrew the whip binding Stark and with a speed usually reserved for Demons, Stark bolted upright and his mouth crashed down onto his. He tasted himself on Stark's tongue coupled with the faint metallic taste of his own blood.

Stark moaned into the kiss as he fist ed his hand in Sesshomaru's long silver hair. Stark shoved into his mouth and molded his lips over his. Sesshomaru blipped some youki into his mouth which absolutely sent Stark over the edge. He threw Sesshomaru to his right and the bed creaked in protest.

They grasped at each other and twisted and tumbled across the bed in a heated frenzy. Stark bit his ear, and sucked on it. He sucked on Stark's neck and scratched down his back. The crystal blue youki swirled around the room punctuated by the twirling, sometimes muffled light of Stark's arc reactor enveloped the room. They flipped off the bed and Sesshomaru landed on his back hard with Stark on top of him. Sesshomaru timed it that way so that he wouldn't incidentally crush him.

He may have been a little overzealous though, when he withdrew his hands his talons had blood on them. Sesshomaru's lips parted.

"It's fine, gorgeous. I've been through literal worse scrapes, besides, tit for tat, your lip isn't looking too good." Stark grinned and bent over to kiss him again. Sesshomaru blipped youki Stark's mouth again anyway. If Stark could heal him, he could do the same in return. He tasted all electricity and metal and he wanted him so ardently. Did he know? Could he tell? He had to understand, to know that those weren't just words he said. That Stark mattered so much to him he'd give up his title, his lands, his life as he knew it.

Stark pulled back and he ran a hand through his hair. He positively glowed blue and the youki in the arc reactor was harmonizing with his youki.

"You...fuck me. Now. I...need, want...God, you're blistering hot. Fuck me please, or I fuck you, or fuck." Stark sounded so heady, and his eyes so deep.

Sesshomaru in a second flipped their positions on the floor, his silver hair pooled down and hung around them, shielding them from everything besides themselves.

Stark was special, he could succeed where he could not. He constantly challenged him and thought of creative ways to solve problems that he couldn't on his own. He was everything the opposite that he had thought a mate was supposed to be. Stark strengthened him, healed him, had his best
interests in mind. He called Jaken by his name, took care of Rin, was even impressed by his true form. He wanted to know everything about him. No one ever wanted to know him this well, this thoroughly. No one had ever thought he was worth the effort.

"Stark. Your yapping is unnecessary." Sesshomaru flashed his fangs in a predatory smile. His golden eyes held a wickedly salacious gleam. Stark below him smiled in return.

"That. I liked that smile. I want more of those." Stark taunted, placing his hand on the side of Sesshomaru's face, cupping in a way that mirrored the way Sesshomaru typically did to him. Stark raised his hips and Sesshomaru lined himself up, he didn't prep Stark this time, but he didn't seem to want it. Stark must have sensed his hesitation.

"Go. Already!") And with that, with no hesitation he eased into Stark and it was too tight, the friction and heat! Sesshomaru let loose a growl and yip as he heard a string of unpronounceable syllables from Stark. He slowly eased in. Even though Stark wanted it fast and hard, he was not going to acquiesce to that request, at least not at first. Could he even last?

"Stark…" Sesshomaru started, but he wasn't sure how to continue. Instead he continued to ease in taking his time. He wanted to take in the delight of the moment. It was so warm and it filled him with such zeal. Lust. Want. Passion. Ardor. His markings danced again and his mouth went slack. Beneath him Stark began to fully relax then hinge up so the tip of his length grazed Sesshomaru's torso, dampening it.

"Sesshomaru…damn." Stark managed to come up and capture his mouth in a soft kiss. A softer kiss than he would have expected from Stark. Sesshomaru cupped the back of his head with his left hand and planted his right on the floor next to Stark.

His Youki danced in the room and swirled like a savage typhoon on the great sea.

He began to languidly, almost gently move in and out of Stark's entry, keeping an almost calm pace. Something deep in Sesshomaru's chest almost ached, and swelled to a bursting point. Why did he feel almost... somber? Stark began to pepper soft kisses across his right cheek and bit down his neck as Sesshomaru moved his own head past Stark's, closing his eyes tight.

His mother's words echoed in his head. *'Don't be like your father. Don't die in a battle over your lover.'*

'Why in the four lands did that particular quote come to my mind? I am nothing like my father, and I am nothing like my mother. I do as I please and I will achieve glory and protect who and what is mine!' Sesshomaru growled and sped up his slow pace, slamming harder eliciting a moan from Stark. Subconsciously the markings that arced over his hips and curved up his chest hue shifted to crimson.

The somber, almost tender melancholy broke loose into an overwhelming bliss and he leaned back to make eye contact with Stark who had his head down, leaving what was surely to be a bruise from his mouth on his collarbone.

"Know this, you are mine." Sesshomaru's eyes bled crimson in the corners. The thought 'to protect and to couple with' was left unsaid. He took his hand and ringed his fingers around Stark's cock and began to pump up and down in an erratic rhythm.

"Right back at ya, and we still have to work on your dirty talk." Stark gasped out as he quivered when Sesshomaru found just the right angle to hit his pleasure spot inside of him. He was so close, he trembled as well and his own ball sack tightened. Sesshomaru sped up, knowing Stark had to be
"I'm gonna…OH." Stark came all over his hand abruptly over hand and Stark fell back onto the youki flooded floor, adrift in the glow. Sesshomaru smiled down upon him and in that instant a warmth filled his groin that curled and grew down his length. He only had to thrust a few more times before times before his eyes flooded red at the edges and his skin tingled and all his muscles shook and softened. He came into Stark with a yip and a gasp.

As he slowly withdrew from Stark, he used his youki to banish most of his semen and slowly Stark stood up and offered his hand.

"Whew that was…..well, that wore me out, let's actually now get between my sheets." Sesshomaru nodded at Stark's request and Stark slid across the bed and bent over the opposite side. Sesshomaru sat on the edge of the bed, debating if he could fully relax and lay down. He took a deep breath, it was strange, to betray an instinct he had since he was a pup, but he would for Stark since it truly bothered him the last time.

He, tentatively, slid down to a mostly lying down position, head propped up on his left arm, which still itched.

"I got Pepper to get you a…wedge pillow? I think it's for old people, and you're definitely old. I am not the Silver Fox, you are. I don't care if you are a teenager in Demon years." Stark produced a pillow that allowed him to sit up…somewhat. So, his age had become a topic among the humans? He knew he was a shade young, but he had no idea why it would matter. He instead focused on the 'wedge pillow'. Had he really fallen so low that his intended mate had Lady Potts get him something so he could sleep? He would prove his strength here. It wasn't necessary. He could sleep laying down. He could.

"…This Sesshomaru will endeavor to sleep as you do. Though the gift is appreciated." Sesshomaru placidly admitted. Yet another gift, something he had not asked for that his intended thought of.

"Oh uh, good, You sure?" Stark hesitated putting the cushion down and Sesshomaru merely narrowed his eyes. Stark relented and instead flopped back over.

"Your chest and sexy hip stripes are red now. I'm literally growing on you. Oh. Wait, am I going to get racing stripes too?" Stark traced Sesshomaru's markings which made the youki in his skin hum.

"No. Only full blooded Demons have markings, and even then not all have them." Sesshomaru explained, which he anticipated would relieve Stark, but instead Stark furrowed his eyebrows.

"That's not exactly fair, your body is changing and, well I'm still me. I guess you can't improve upon this." Stark smiled broadly, but it rang a little false. Sesshomaru breathed through his nose. Was Stark so blind?

"My youki has entered your…arc reactor." Sesshomaru had hoped that was the real name of his power device. "It will eventually ebb into your bloodstream, thus altering your body. That will occur." Sesshomaru positively knew that is what would occur if they were to strengthen, or complete their mating ritual.

"…what do you mean alter?" Stark suddenly stopped tracing his markings. Sesshomaru brought a curled finger to his lips.

"I am unsure. I did not fraternize with any Demons who have…had mated with a human, and Bokuseno does not exist in this time to ask such an inquiry to. You will most certainly stay human,
though it is in the realm of possibility you may get enhanced instincts or faculties." Sesshomaru answered honestly, but left out a crucial detail. Stark's lifespan could increase to that of close to a hanyou if he calculated the math correctly. One of his cousins, who he also had to cut down, had mated with a grating hanyou and her lifespan increased to that closer to a full-blooded Demon. It was possible, but he had little idea if it would happen. He wasn't sure if Stark wanted it to happen.

He'd rather not think about it altogether.

"Ha. Take that Legolas, I'm gonna get super vision too." Stark smirked and Sesshomaru resisted the urge to roll his eyes. It didn't work in that manner.

"I have a pertinent question." Sesshomaru stated and that got Stark's attention. "You asked me what I desired. What do you desire Stark?" Sesshomaru reached out and grabbed Stark's wrist which had skirted a bit below to the silvery trail of hair that led down to his cock. He wanted Stark to focus.

"You. For one. But you're not a what. I want to kick Fury's ass, still. I did get to throw him out of my house today and pull rank, which was still fun. Aside from protecting the people I care about from this invasion, I want to get back to Malibu. You'd totally love it, less 'stinking humans' and more sand and waves. Even though Jaken says there will always be a need to make weapons, that's not what I want to do. I like the whole clean energy thing. Save the planet from invaders and ourselves. Oh, and I want to set fire to Justin Hammer's hair and throw him back in jail. He made those guns that the Chitauri have, I hacked his database. It'd be nice for things to get back to normal." Stark's rambling's ended in a yawn. He was tired as well. Sesshomaru hadn't expected Stark to go into so earnest detail. He had also heard this place Malibu before, it was the place Polly stated he looked like he was from when they first met. Perhaps he would enjoy it.

"I cannot be this normalcy you desire. You know this Stark." Sesshomaru murmured, finally laying his head down on the soft cushion. Maybe he could fall asleep like this after all. Stark slid across the bed on his side, his exact mirror on the bed.

"Jesus, you're not still on that, are you? You're my prissy, pissy, exhausting, sulking, brooding, teenage angst, incredible, gorgeous, physics defying, super-powered anomaly who can apparently turn into light, pilot a quinjet, and all while being a teenage single father. Besides, you've been here long enough to know that I'm far from normal myself. I'm extraordinary and so is my life, I could just deal with less war-mongering space titans." Stark rolled his eyes and glared half-heartedly at Sesshomaru who blinked.

Stark bit down on Sesshomaru's ear, and Sesshomaru flicked it.

"Got it?" Stark reinforced, eyes playful.

Sesshomaru let loose a small smile.

"Get some sleep beautiful. We got a hell of a day tomorrow. Again." Stark yawned again and closed his eyes. Sesshomaru hummed in response. He did not look forward to dealing with Loki and his pacing and nervous ramblings but it would have to be done.

The official war assembly.

Sesshomaru slept some, but it did not come easily and did not stay long. He awoke still at a late hour. Stark lay sprawled on his back soundly. Good no sign of a night terror.

Sesshomaru silently and swiftly dressed and made his way down to his former quarters, which now housed the whirling youki containment field, and more importantly the scepter.
Maybe where Bakusaiga could not, his toxin could? Sesshomaru unspooled his whip and arced it back and with every inch of torque he spun. An immense bolt of pain lanced from his left arm, though his torso down his right arm. His right arm, as if possessed by wires or snakes, slung the whip safely wide of its target, causing an empty loop. Cursed indeed.

Muffled footsteps.

Rogers almost soundlessly padded to a position behind him. So, there was a witness in his failure. Sesshomaru turned to eye the vigilant human who was fully clothed as if he never attempted sleep. Maybe his talons could melt the scepter directly. However, then Sesshomaru remembered Rogers had already tried to destroy the scepter with his shield. If his toxin had no effect on Rogers' shield, it would most likely be just as ineffective against the scepter as well.

His arm throbbed, stinging.

They stood together, side by side in a comfortable, though stern silence. Sesshomaru could easily smell the emotion of frustration and unease wafting off Rogers. They both disliked this situation, yet had no power to change it.

"This is my responsibility. Not yours. I'm the leader of the Avengers, but I haven't been acting like it. Leaders prepare. They lead from the front. They don't…do whatever I did today." Rogers admitted and Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes. What was this sleep deprived human prattling on about now? Was this some sort of…confession? Sesshomaru thought of the actions Rogers' took thus far: he protected Stark from harm during the ploy with Loki, he attempted to break up his spar with Thor, he accompanied a very unstable Loki to another metropolis to retrieve a hostile weapon. He did what he had the power to do, and had been in the dark for many a decision.

Pause.

"You tolerate Loki's indirectness and secrecy far better than most would in your position. You have never acted against the best interest of your army, nor have you allowed your emotions to take control and act rashly. That is what a true general does." Sesshomaru articulated impassively and Rogers rocked back on his heels.

"…huh. Um. Wasn't expecting a compliment. I guess you'd know, too." Rogers pursed his lips, deep in thought, watching the scepter. Sesshomaru could smell the smoldering thoughts smoking in Rogers' mind.

Pause.

"I had a best friend once, Bucky. He always had my back and looked after me, not unlike Loki to you. He died on a mission I led, I still feel responsible. If this scepter…” Rogers trailed off, distracted by Sesshomaru turning to him abruptly, talons extended.

"If what you are implying occurs, I will cut Loki down myself. That, Rogers, is my responsibility.” Sesshomaru stated retracting his claws to make a point. He did not need this human thinking that he would need or allow someone else to kill Loki if his mind was fully lost to the Other's scepter.

However, the scenario seemed unrealistic. If Loki could untangle his mind from the scepter before, Sesshomaru had faith he could do so again.

Pause.

"What about Thor?” Rogers question and Sesshomaru's eyes flashed.
"Storm God may seek his revenge upon me if I were to kill Loki, but he would fail." Sesshomaru on no certain terms would allow Thor to kill him like he had seen in his false-scrys.

"That's not really what I meant..." Rogers trailed off and Sesshomaru caught on. Four Lands forbid Thor be handed such a task. Thor, the soft-hearted Aesir, could never be asked to shoulder such a burden to kill Loki. It was also, in some way, an unspoken agreement between the two, that they would slay each other if necessary.

"I'll do everything in my power to prevent something like that from happening. And not just to protect Earth, but also to repay him for saving Natasha and I." Rogers sighed. He sounded tired, but the kind of fatigued that sleep could not alleviate. So, he wished to repay Loki for healing him from Hakudoshi's miasma? Honorable, though it should not be his priority.

Sesshomaru turned to leave the scepter room, there was nothing else he could do here and he had a feeling if Stark awoke and he was not in his quarters he would come find him. Stark needed his rest.

"Goodnight, Rogers." Sesshomaru decided to formally bid farewell to the troubled captain who merely just waved him off. He arrived back into Stark's quarters to see Stark toss and then turn on the bed, sheets tangled in his legs. Sesshomaru sighed through his nose and removed his clothes and slipped back into bed. He truly wasn't used to sleeping in such finery, not since the war.

Sesshomaru wordlessly reached over and misted his calming youki over Stark, much like he did the shellfish he returned with, and Stark's thrashing eventually ceased. Sesshomaru laid down on his side, watching Stark's chest rise up and down, and the arc reactor's blue light with it. It was hypnotic in a way....

"Rise and shine, prince—" Sesshomaru's eyes shot open and utilizing his full speed he flashed to a standing position, senses on full alert, talons long. On instinct he summoned he flashed his youki out in a wave. He had NOT meant to fall back asleep. He had NOT meant to be unprepared for action. This was inopportune, he should have been the first to rise, if he had gone back to sleep at all.

Was he the last to rise?

"Whoa. Shit. I'm not a morning person either, but did you have to...like break everything? I guess it's good we have the roombas now." Sesshomaru calmed his senses and saw that the room had been knocked into complete disarray from his youki, paintings off the wall, mirror shattered, various odds and ends blown off the small tables and some broken. Stark's hair also stuck up at odd angles, but that could have been from his sleeping position. No, he smelled sweat, like Stark had been active or overheated.

"..." Sesshomaru surveyed Stark who appeared a bit stunned from his reaction. His ears stuck almost straight up and his spine froze in place as Stark sighed and maneuvered across the bed to stand up next to him, stretching.

"Look, you feeling like you always have to be 'on' is just going to stress me out, and it obviously isn't good on your heart rate. Have faith in D.E.M.O.N.S., your own spidey senses, me, and the rest of us. You're safe here, and it's not your responsibility to defend the tower anyway, it's mine." Stark grinned, bending down to touch his toes. His statement eerily mirrored the one he and Rogers had earlier.

When he came back up, Stark wound back and slapped Sesshomaru's ass. Sesshomaru growled back half-heartedly. He wasn't against such foreplay but it caught him off guard. Again. Catching
him off guard was an activity Stark certainly reveled in doing.

"You growled once in your sleep, you know, it was hot. Let's take a shower, we got plenty of time. Dr. Foster is still teaching Thor how to skype, Steve is still sounding off on Fury, Natasha is attempting to teach Jaken jo-kata…something….and Reindeer games and his 'Artemis turned Aphrodite' just got back from a Greek myth themed orgy based on the bow and hickeys that Clint has now." Stark winked at him and motioned for him to follow him into the bathroom.

"You're the one that needs bathing. Not me." It wasn't that he was opposed to the idea entirely, however Rin would require some form of meal in the morning. Judging by the sun it had to be close to nine in the morning.

"After last night, and the way your hair looks right now, doubt it. Bruce is on Little Miss Sunshine duty. He got guilted into it, so you definitely have time. Let's have one more for the road before what could be the battle strategy session to decide the fate of the word, alright?" Stark jutted his chin up and gestured to himself as a whole. At times Sesshomaru wondered if Stark had some sort of telepathic capabilities, or if he had become just that easy to read. Soft.

He wondered if Stark was getting smarter, or perhaps, he was losing his edge. Both?

'The worst threat to have, is one too close to kill.' His father once admitted.

'Wine cannot get you drunk, but passion still can. Tread lightly my son, as you are quite the lure.' His mother once taunted.

'The most outrageous rumor being that the enchanted blade could resurrect the dead. What madness to craft a weapon that humans would squabble over indefinitely! They'd stop at nothing to possess it!' Loki had chuckled on the roof of Stark's tower when he first arrived.

'We should leave, my Lord. We should leave and not look back.' Jaken had advised while eating meat on the antenna of the Chrysler Tower.

'These Gods, these humans will only bring harm to my Father!' Bakusaiga had accused of Tenseiga in his mother's tomb.

Since when, exactly, had he gone from completely ignoring Tensiga's counsel, to his being the only voice he listened to?

Was he leaning too solely on Tenseiga? Was everyone else in his life mistaken and only Tenseiga correct? Loki himself stated that if Tenseiga's true nature had been revealed to the humans, they would come for him. As so far, only Lady Potts knew of Tenseiga. How long would that last? Was it merely a matter of time before all the humans that Loki, Banner, and Stark had told him had harkened to him so, to turn?

Would a relatively simple defense mission turn sour due to Tenseiga, ironically the counsel he was solely listening to?

Stark wouldn't turn on him.

'You have to know by now I never do anything half-assed, and I know you don't either. I'm in.' Stark had just confirmed.

However…

'Don't be like your father. Don't die in a battle over your lover' His mother had implored in her
tomb.

Yet…

'It was blessed by the divine, intended to protect its wielder and guide him.' Loki forged Tenseiga to guide him. He knew Loki would brag, exaggerate, lie about many things, but he wouldn't lie about Tenseiga even if he didn't fully understand him.

Sesshomaru understood Tenseiga, even if he didn't really care to, or want to listen to his opinion much before.

'His destiny, entwined with those of the humans and the Gods, point to a victory.' Tenseiga had also reassured him in his mother's tomb. Taking advice from a Hanyou, he truly hadn't seen it coming.

"C'mon, you know you want me to wash your rapunzel hair again, among other things." Stark snapped him out of his revelry. Stark then gave him an odd look.

"This Rapunzel, is yet another fictional yellow-haired maiden I take it?" Sesshomaru cracked his knuckles, mind finally slowing down. He hadn't realized his inner thoughts had gotten so complicated that even Stark picked up on it.

"Join me and find out, hot stuff." Stark's eyes glimmered. He had already made up his mind.

He had always made a decision, and stuck by it. Sesshomaru had no room for doubt. He would simply let things play out.

'Play out to a victory, that is.' Sesshomaru smirked as he followed Stark into the bath.

Chapter End Notes

Well will you look at that. They've finally used their words to commit. Poor Sesshomaru better figure out that curse before it's too late.

It's been way too long since I've had some fluffy smut with our four guys. Now onto the plot next chapter!

thanks again to everyone who has commented like: elka16667, Saucie_Wasabi, Allthingsanon, Cartlin (AcaciaJules), legion11, Allyonora, Caitriona695, and all the other wonderful commenters who have helped me get this far! thank you for continuing to fuel my fire!

-TL
Tony took a sip of his coffee, sans-scotch, of which he was pretty proud of himself. He had expected the beginning of this meeting to give him some anxiety, give him a headache, or give him indigestion, but standing next to Sesshomaru, who was dressed in jeans that hugged his hips a little too well and a scarlet silk button up (Armani maybe?) steadied him. He had expected him to be wearing his silk kimono thing, but after the shower he simply hung it up in the closet next to his really cheesy, gaudy one.

Tony scoffed at himself, he never would have thought a man who consistently wore aviators, a fur boa and sported face tattoos would provide him mental stability…but here he was. He wouldn’t trade him for anything. Hell he'd give away all his stupid cars (even the Shelby) and dump his stocks to keep him, not that was really all that realistic.

He was lucky, maybe. Maybe they all were lucky in a kinda fucked up sort of way. No…there was definitely a time where Tony didn't believe in luck. Luck was what people believed in when they didn't recognize what was really at work, or how much work something took to achieve.

But…

The shrapnel…

The void…

Coulson being alive…

Loki using the Bifrost to bring forward into time the most devastatingly handsome pain-in-the-ass white knight to rival Thor.

Maybe…luck existed? Tony didn't really know to do with that epiphany that snuck up on him like Little Miss Sunshine when he had been caught staring at her Lord and father-figure.

The weight of responsibility for the invasion still weighed on him, but the asphyxiation that plagued him had dissipated. He knew the Demon Lord, with an ass that he would be happy to worship for decades, would stop at nothing to help him protect what was his. He knew that in a way that shocked him, but the evidence was there and he wasn't going to question it.

He was committed, all in, no bluff, he had a full house.

Everyone who thought he was bluffing about his decision could kiss. His. Ass. Though it had definitely not sunk in yet that he was basically engaged to a Demon Lord. What had sunk in though was that he was staying. Sesshomaru stood by his side, and he wasn't going back to his time…his old life. It honestly spooked Tony a bit. Sesshomaru was giving up everything he knew to be with him, a sacrifice Tony was having a hard time wrapping his head around.

He got what, rather who, he wanted, and it still buzzed in his system that this was really happening.
Sesshomaru chose him, and while it was a little…uh…intimidating…he knew he could make worth the Demon Lord's while. He knew he could compliment his strengths and skills with his tech and intellect. They made a killer team, Tony knew this. He wasn't going to screw this up like he did with Pepper. He…wait.

God his life was so backwards.

Did he seriously accept a marriage proposal before either of them saying THOSE three little words?

Tony's eyes went wide.

'Do I love him?' Tony paused mid-sip of his Colombian coffee. 'Fuck. Do I love him?' A ribbon of anxiety crept up Tony's throat as he stole a glance to the drop dead gorgeous Demon next to him who had his head tilted towards Little Miss Sunshine and her cone of rainbow sherbet. Tony could tell by his ears, and the relaxed position of Sesshomaru's jaw that he was plenty content.

He was also pretty damn content with what happened in the shower this morning as well.

His posture also hinted he was in a good mood. He wasn't rigidly standing there like he would be if there were too many people for his liking. Tony knew he didn't like crowds, or a lot of attention on him. His shoulders were also up and not that slightly slumped angle they had when he was in a sulky….Oh god, how did this happen? How had he managed to know someone's body language as well as the schematic to his arc reactor? Christ, he could read the Demon Lord in a way no one else could, that was for damn sure. Not even Loki, maybe not even Nat.

As if he could read Tony's mind Sesshomaru sliced his gaze over to Tony, chin tilted slightly up. Tony got a good, long view of his neck and was mad that the hickey he left in the shower that morning had already faded.

So. Not. Fair.

"Stark do you want one? Lord Sesshomaru told me it is an Eggo homestyle!" Rin materialized next to him the only way kids could.

"Um…I'm good sunshine, going carb light." It could never hurt to shave off those few stubborn pounds he had on him. Not that romping around with a shredded Demon Lord made him self conscious.

"What does homestyle mean? Why is it called an Eggo if Uncle Loki called it a waffle?" Rin ran up to him with far too many questions. From across the room he felt the sharp heat of a gaze. Loki. He probably knew something. He probably put her up to this. He hated that guy sometimes. Well, ok, not full blown hate, but a good medium-well grilled hate.

Tony looked to Sesshomaru for help who simply ate more of his steak. He was of course no help, like he knew what a waffle was. Tony still had no idea what to do with kids….oh wait, that was what the babysitter was for.

"You know who knows the answer, is Bruce." Tony redirected Sunshine's incessant energy towards Bruce who paled. He could still put him on babysitting duty while he tried to sneak a question to her dad about his sun gla—

Dad.

Christ he was going to be a father. Step father? Adopted father? Great fucking job, Tony, way to
think things through. How was he going to do this?! It wasn't that he didn't like Rin. She was smart, observant even for a kid, and she did like those Bill Nye the Science Guy youtube videos he showed her. But…how could he help raise a child? Especially one from the feudal era of Japan! He didn't exactly have a great framework to work with Howard's stunning example of parenting leaving him feel like a sack of shit castaway. No shows at everything, not even a card for his birthday. Oh lord, he was going to have to remember birthdays.

Tony doubted he could make Pepper remind him.

He'd have to ask Rin what her birthday was, wait, that one time he asked Sesshomaru for the date he said 'solar year'. Japan used the lunar calendar back then didn't they? Could he cheat and just convert it? There was no way he could remember a damn moon cycle.

Did Sesshomaru have a birthday? Did Demons celebrate every 'human' year? Tony hoped not, because there was no way he could figure out what a Demon would want for his birthday. A sacrifice? More aviators? Christ what exactly had he done?!

"Yes, Man of Iron, tell me, why are those breakfast pastries called eggos if they don't even taste nor resemble them?" Thor's voice boomed across the speaker system and Loki barked out a quick laugh. Oh. God.

Loki.

Loki was Sesshomaru's basically adopted big brother.

Was Loki seriously going to be his brother-in-law?! Clint?! Tony didn't know which was worse. He and Clint had been on some damn rocky terrain recently and he was not about to let the whole 'manipulate my now fiancé into scrying his hysterical boyfriend and having him pass out which put Tony into a new stratosphere of pissed and worried because if he didn't fucking wake up because he was helping LOKI of ALL PEOPLE who got him into this stupid mess in the first place he was going to make Loki WISH he had been dragged off by Fury.' Tony's left hand was a white knuckled fist at his side. He would never forget the vaulting, cascading warmth of relief when Sesshomaru's eyes opened and his stripes and moon had turned back to their normal colors.

When Sesshomaru didn't wake back up right away, he almost lost it on his future fucking brother in laws. Even Rin had been upset and he didn't really know how to calm her down, but Clint sure did with the damn pizza and….

"Stark." Tony whipped his head around. Sesshomaru's face was neutral and didn't reveal anything, but the warmth of his hand on his clenched fist gave him away.

Tony studied him, taking a sip of his quickly dwindling and cooling coffee. He was vibrating out of his skin. He had to get out of here and think about how this morning everything was FINE. And now, it didn't feel so FINE. Tony knew this whole war room thing wasn't going to be FINE, but he didn't think it was going to be his impending mating ritual with his fiancé that was making his blood itch.

Was this what heroin addicts felt like?

Something.

He needed something otherwise he was going to lose his cool which would make no sense to anyone here. He also didn't want the extra attention while he figured out just how down this rabbit hole of….commitment was.
But Sesshomaru's gaze bore into him like coals on his skin and he took a deep breath and relaxed his fist. He could fake this. He could get through their 'all important pow wow to end all pow wows'. He could pick up the damn pom poms and cheer on Steve and 'Sesshoki'. God. Sesshoki. No. Tony downed his luke warm coffee.

"I'm good Moonie. Really." Tony knew that probably didn't convince him but it was really his best effort. Really. He really. Really. REALLY. Should have taken that Xanax. He didn't because this morning was one of the best he had in a long, long time.

Tony woke up and saw that vision in bed and smiled like he meant it. Because he did mean it, Sesshomaru was in his bed and they were together. Then that really got him worked up that he decided to prove Nat wrong and actually do some cardio. He had to do something 'cardio oriented' because he wasn't going to be 'that guy' to wake him up for attention. That's not what Tony Stark did. Tony didn't do needy. He didn't wake up Demon Lord Boyfriends at seven forty-ish am for hanky-panky when he had a shitfest of a day the day before.

He could wait. Until it was like, 9:21 am and he had run four miles, watched the video between him and Steve like four times, and had one cup of coffee and he STILL wasn't up. He couldn't wait all day, they had things to do. He had to do things to him!

Plus, if Bambi and Robin Hood were getting it on, he wanted some too. Tony knew he was a selfish being, but to his credit he didn't mean to scare Sesshomaru out of his skin. Tony, a few years ago would have laughed at him, but he got it. Sometimes he woke up like that too and judging by how long his claws were and the red that bled into his eyes he was really out of it. Fuck. Sesshomaru was so good with him when he lost his shit, and he went and fucking caused him to panic like the Tower was falling down. He didn't want to make a big deal out of it, but it also surprised the hell out of him. Was that how he looked when he turned into an unhinged mess? And fuck, he caused it.

Tony knew he was shit at comforting people, but damn he wanted to be better, at least for him. He legitimately wanted to not only return the favor for being a calming pillar of strength for him, but because he never wanted him to feel panic that he did.

The same bitter panic was jolting through his nerve endings and feeding on his spinal column now at the WORST time possible. He had his head on straight yesterday when Sesshomaru could've been dead…why was he a basket case now? Christ he needed a drink. Did he have time to go get something? What would Steve think? Ugh. He and Pepper would PITCH. A. FIT. Loki would probably say something snarky, assholish, and dramatic and Clint would hover around Loki, like he made the world turn, agree with him, and Thor would say something one half right, two halves wrong.

Bruce…he'd probably understand? Or he might be holding a grudge about leaving him with Sunshine for the whole morning.

He wasn't touching the issue of his fiancé right now. Who was still holding his hand which was just a little TOO much.

Tony almost took his hand back from Sesshomaru's when something really unexpected happened. Tony nearly jumped in the air when his arc reactor warmed up and something like the nicest hit of
the best California cannabis money could buy, flooded his lungs. No. Not his lungs, it spread
down his arms and legs and into his head and...the bitter percolating panic faded out like the music
from a car driving by.

Was that….youki? He had definitely felt this….blanket of…zen before. Sesshomaru did say his
youki would start to meld into his blood stream. He'd have to get a blood test done or something
now…but if that's what it did, it didn't scream emergency.

Actually, he was struggling to dredge that previous panic up again. He…didn't feel so shit. He had
a grip. In fact….Tony turned his hand over and gave Sesshomaru's clawed one a quick squeeze. He
finally dared to look Sesshomaru back in his eyes, but by then he had turned to Steve. Tony didn't
know what that meant.

Sesshomaru squeezed his hand gently back. OK, he knew what that meant. They were ok. Well it
wasn't like he could really read his mind about getting cold feet. He wasn't really a telepath.

"Alright, I think we're all set and uh, here for the most part.” Steve sounded a lot more confident
than his words made him out to be as he announced to his living room.

Plus one ice cream girl. Because of course they had an Ice Cream scooper here. He had almost
forgotten about her. Polly.

Polly, wide-eyed, sat on the other side of Rin. Little Miss Sunshine had originally wanted to go
visit her, but time ran short so Pepper just had Happy go pick her up.

He thought Steve would lose his composure and give another lecture on who should be let in the
super-secret invasion. Steve circle-time, and he kinda did lose his cool, but as Natasha already
pointed out it was too late for that.

It didn't take a genius like him to see that Steve was struggling with the whole 'I'm the
overwhelmed babysitter of two gods, a Demon, and a bunch of heroes and assassins, and I have to
get everyone to get along to save a planet half full of idiots.' Tony was going to play nice with their
spangled captain who looked like hell.

So, he had his back, Sesshomaru had a point down in the scepter room, Steve had tolerated Loki's
shit a lot better than he had.

Tony got where he was coming from when Cap said maybe bringing a girl who got arrested for
some not so peaceful Wall Street protesting, public intoxication, and who was associated with
some pretty shady petty criminals in New Jersey into his tower to be briefed on an alien invasion.

Yeah, he ran her background, she wasn't bad news, but she wasn't squeaky clean either.

They got overruled, which Tony actually didn't see coming.

Miss Spy Universe said if they all had to leave New York, it would be good to have someone on
the ground as a look out… or something.

Sesshomaru also firmly asserted he promised Rin that she would see her today, and he TRUSTED
her with invasion plans. And well, since he knew Moonie wasn't the type who trusted easy he sort
of just…let it happen?

Tony Stark wasn't whipped. No way.

If Pep, Nat, and his princess of a fiance wanted someone in the tower… well fine he'd let it happen.
Tony knew how to choose his battles and this was not the hill he was going to die on.

Polly also had been, despite her 90's punk goth thing she was rocking, hadn't done anything but talk to Rin, Jaken, and observe. He didn't peg her for the quiet type, so she must know when to listen, which was convenient. Though Tony wasn't born yesterday, he could tell she was just itching to say SOMETHING.

He had to admit though, he didn't see an ice cream scooper being at this hootenanny over Fury a few weeks ago.

Tony had put Fury on permanent voicemail, rendering him notably absent. That was the hill Tony Stark was going to die on. Tony's blood simmered from the looks Fury was giving his boyfriend now fiancé when he was comatose and all swirl. He knew Fury and SHIELD would try to pick his brain apart once Bruce had told him about his Astral Window ability and when Rin had told him about the scrying.

Fury almost looked like he had an idea about what scrying was. That fucking unnerved Tony.

Tony kicked him out of his tower long before Natasha, Cap, and Horns made it back with Jaken. However, unfortunately not before Jaken turned into a super sea serpent and smoked the shields on the Aethon.

He caught Fury's eye light up and that is what pushed him over the goddamn edge. Not only was little green not as insufferable as Tony had previously thought, yes even he could be wrong, but he was his fiance's loyal best friend and one Tony trusted way more than Loki with certain things.

It really made his week when we he got in Fury's face and told him to get lost. Don't call us, we'll call you.

Pepper to his right cleared her throat. OK, maybe he did zone out.

"The threat is here. It's time we got ready so we aren't on our heels like we were last time. Sesshomaru, care to enlighten us about anything you learned from your mother?" Steve began with Sesshomaru, short and sweet. Tony had predicted this. He watched the video of the scepter room before he woke up the sleeping Demon Lord.

He was only a little pissed that Sesshomaru had gone and tried to destroy the scepter, again! He had sorta let him have it in the shower… well among other things.

He turned on the water to the shower, waiting for it to warm up and start to fog the room. He wanted to have this conversation with Sesshomaru before they engaged in some form of risky behavior. Contrary to somewhat popular belief, thanks again TMZ, he didn't really do shower sex. It was usually a lot more awkward and more hassle than what it was worth.

He also, though he would never admit it, just sorta, kinda wanted to wash his hair. It was…well. Nice. Like fairy tale princess nice. Ugh. He hated even thinking it, but knowing that when it dried and looked nice, it was he who made it look good.

And having his hair smell like his shampoo…. Well. That was an unexpected turn on.

Butttttttt, that didn't mean that he couldn't get creative. Tony always loved a helping hand, but that was for later. Now he had to chew out a Demon Lord.
From behind, lips positively attacked the valley where his neck met his shoulder. Cheater.

"Hey, hey, Lestat before things get steamy I gotta say something or I'm really gonna get distracted." Tony protested and hoped he sounded more sure and manly than he really thought he did.

The lips left his shoulder as did the smooth hands on his arm and shoulder. The brush of his soft, but messed hair was also missed as Tony turned around to meet sharp gold eyes.

They still caused his blood to rocket through his veins.

"You told me this curse was bad news. And I'm not blind, the mark..." Tony trailed off looking at the violent slashed burn on the soft underarm of his fiancé. Some colossal prick sorcerer carved HIS name on HIM. And he was letting it get worse and fester! And it took everything in Tony to not utterly lose his shit because who dare claim someone so close to him?! Who dare try to own him, like he was someone else's. Like a fucking pet or slave or he was going to study that scepter and find the Other and....

Tony. Cool it.

"Steve was right. You were right, we tried to get you to do our dirty work and I'm still mad I let it happen. The scepter is our responsibility. You weren't even here when we decided to get it. I don't want you messing with the scepter, or any more of that...abomination's magic until I can study it some more. I'm a genius and if anyone can figure out a way to use this magic against them and another way to break the curse it's me. And maybe Bruce." Tony reluctantly tossed the idea around in his head of letting Bruce back into his lab for this. This was important. This could be more than the grudge he was holding on to. He could let that go, he could be BETTER than his pride. Bruce did tell him about Fury and the space windows.

Sesshomaru stared though his skull for what seemed like a century. It was certainly long enough for the water to heat up and begin to fog the room. Tony was not about to back down on this. He didn't understand what this curse was going

"I cannot promise this to you in its entirety." Sesshomaru finally admitted. Tony was about to get in his face until he saw the handsome Demon do something he had never done before, he broke his gaze and ran a clawed hand through his hair as if to shake something out of it. "The scepter I shall leave be, however the shields on their vessels are the Others' magic. I will not back down from engaging the enemy because of a mere inconvenience. I am fully aware of my abilities and my disciplines. I can and will dissolve this curse." Sesshomaru pressed, his voice sounded almost low and raspy, like he had smoked a cigarette.

Tony grabbed the taller Demon by his lean, taut shoulders and forced him to look at him.

"Deal. But you're not alone, I got your back. I'll be damned if I let some two bit magican get over on us. We are a team, um the A team, and there is nothing on or off this stupid planet that will stop me from letting you go off on your own and do something stupid, including, no, definitely you. Loki brought you into this mess, but I'm damn certain not –"

Tony was cut off by Sesshomaru closing the gap suddenly with a soft kiss.

"Stark. Enough. I will not perish here." Sesshomaru stated with a slight smile toying on his full lips. The only soft anomaly about his entire face.

"I know babe." Babe? Fuck! Go with it. "Like I'd let you. But....I got question for ya." Tony
recovered smoothly. He didn't mean to get so damn sappy.

"I acquiesce." Sesshomaru moved under the showerhead, brushing his bangs back.

"Are you keeping any other important secrets from me? You kept flying from me, for one, and the dog form, two. Jaken might have gotten tanked and said you've got some other tricks up your sleeve. He even told me to ask you." Tony spilled out, running his hands down Sesshomaru's smooth, toned, and wet arms.

Sesshomaru paused and furrowed his eyebrows slightly. His eyes darkened and for a moment Tony thought he almost looked angry. But that wasn't what he was feeling. Tony couldn't read him though, which confused him because he had gotten pretty damn good at it.

"...You seem to be operating under the impression that Tenseiga and Bakusaiga are simply swords. They are not." Sesshomaru turned to Tony and Tony huffed.

"Yeah, I mean, I get you can call them to you, make them fly, the Backgammon one can disintegrate people..." Tony listed and Sesshomaru's mouth hardened. Oh, he meant something else?

"They are not mere weapons, Stark. Bakusaiga is my progeny, she is a full-blooded Demon. Tenseiga is forged equally from Loki's own magic and my father's fang, rendering him a Hanyou, a half Demon. How they represent themselves now are their true forms, much like my Canine form and Jaken's River Serpent form." Sesshomaru sternly informed and continued. "They have their own abilities and identities. Tenseiga approves of you, Bakusaiga....does not."

Tony could only say he had been rendered this speechless very few times in his life. This was probably in the top three. He didn't expect that when Jaken told him to ask him about secrets. But, now it made sense that he referred to them as he and she, and their names...and even...Clint had started to do it.

"Wait. Clint hasn't seen them, has he? Like their...people form?" Tony's jealousy churned even though he knew better.

"Yes. Bakusaiga in particular has taken a shine to him." Sesshomaru moved to let Tony into the shower stream and Tony just grumbled.

"Of course he did, and of course she has." Tony sighed heavily and dramatically. He was laying it on thick on purpose as Sesshomaru let out a ghost of a smirk. Jerk.

"Envy not, Barton, and worry not about her opinion of you. She reviles Loki most." Tony's face brightened. Score one.

"Damn, now I can't say she has bad tastes. You should probably listen to her; I've been known to be a terrible influence on people." Tony laughed because it was true. Sesshomaru simply tilted his head to the side, one of his lips curled slightly up.

"Hmmm... I have the reputation of not being easily influenced." Sesshomaru ran his talons down Tony's sides which caused his gut to coil in warmth.

"Now let's wash that hair of yours and I want to push you up against the shower wall and finger and stroke you till you come across the floor." Tony decided that a much needed change of subject was in order.

"And here I thought you simply wished to wash my hair." Sesshomaru chuckled softly. He. Actually.
Laughed. It wasn't the laugh he did for Clint but...oh God.

"Warned you, bad influence, and if I wanted something simple, I wouldn't want you." Tony waggled his eyebrows in a way that he knew drove people crazy. When Sesshomaru's eyes flashed, Tony knew he had him hooked.

He had learned, from the video of him and Cap, exactly what Sesshomaru thought of Thor in their weird sibling triangle. He obviously thought that Thor didn't have the right to kill Loki if he really went full Helter Skelter, but also that he probably didn't have what it takes to do it. Or... he was just saving Thor that particular unpleasant task. There was no doubt that Tony was going to study this damn scepter.

It was common knowledge that Tony didn't like, fully trust, or fully give a shit about Loki, but like hell was he gonna stand by with his thumb up his ass and watch as his Demon Lord fiancé murder his best friend because of a magic wand. He was going to figure this scepter out so it never came to that.

Sesshomaru didn't deserve to be reunited with his best friend only to have to murder him. That was some Shakespeare in the Park right there.

It was the least he could do, and he knew it would even be fun. Alien tech, maybe they could ahead of the curve, beat them at their own game.

"This is not the first encounter this realm has had with this Titan. He was here five hundred years ago, questing for a Gem of the Greater Cosmos, and an army of my fellow Demons. He acquired neither." Sesshomaru led voice placid like a lake. His voice never failed to stir something deep and hidden inside him.

"That's impossible. If the Mad Titan was here five hundred years ago Thor and I would have known about it. Odin would ha—" Loki trailed off his magic curling around him like green smoke. He always had to be so goddamn dramatic. Suddenly the magic sparked black like obsidian shards. Loki paled even lighter than Sesshomaru and he mouthed something that Tony didn't catch. This pow wow was already beginning to unravel due to Loki.

Oh shawarma, Loki's posture stiffened like he had been struck in the back with a baseball bat

Thunder boomed through the speaker system. Thor's pissed too?

"Brother! Half a millennium ago we were on a mission from Allfather to Alfheim! Twas a lengthy excursion if I reca—" Thor's eyes raged blue as he shouted through the holoprojector, obviously he hadn't caught on that he didn't have to yell to be heard.

"Silence! That can be no coincidence! Sho what happened?!!" Loki was shaking at this point and his dark magic had begun to leech out across the floor. Just what, in the words of Steve, had rustled the jimmies of both Point Break and Reindeer Games so badly?

Oh fuck.

Loki had told them all during storytime that he searched for centuries for Sesshomaru and all the Demons, but found zilch and his father knew the search was in vain the whole time.

Maybe Nat had a point, maybe he could be a bit slow... because while Clint had told them that
Thanos had kicked Earth's ass before, it now clicked and Tony had to put down his coffee mug before his shaking hand dropped it.

"Loki...breathe ok?" Clint, who had on his trademark tacky workout gear, put up a pretty weak attempt to calm down babbling Bambi. Tony was trying to steady his own breathing.

If he were in Loki's aesir diva boots he'd want to wreck something too, but there was a time and a place for all of that and this wasn't it. Maybe after this he and Clint could go let off some steam, but not right now. He was amping everyone else up in the room. Including Tony because now he had to really process what had happened.

Thanos had come. He had won. That meant he killed...

Thanos killed Sesshomaru five hundred years ago. But not this one. A...sham Sesshomaru Shamshomaru.

Not the one standing next to him.

Now, Tony knew Clint had told him all of this. Sesshomaru and his army had lost the war against Thanos, but it wasn't the guy next to him. They basically created two branches in time. Maybe it didn't faze Tony as much as it should, but seeing Sesshomaru dressed to kill next to... oh

That sly dog.

Is that why he shelved the kimono and wore modern clothes, to really drive the point home that he wasn't the Sesshomaru who lost to some space thug five hundred years ago?

Buuuuuuuuuut...Loki didn't look like he could be reasoned with like that.

"Correct. My mother knew the Mad Titan was searching for us and the Soul Gem Of the Greater Cosmos and informed Odin to stand down. Odin as a result sent you and Storm God away as to not interfere with our war." Sesshomaru explained almost disinterestedly, but Tony could tell that he was a bit wary of Loki because his ice blue youki had too pooled out onto the floor.

Vines began to race across the floor from Loki feet.

"The Soul Gem? Us? You mean the Demons? DON'T TELL ME YOU WERE ALL SLAUGHTERED BY HIM WHILE I WAS OFF LISTENING TO YEARS OF REPEATING LECTURES FROM FAT OLD ELVES!" Loki was screaming at this point and as if the sun had set, the light in the room had dimmed and the electricity that powered them had dimmed.

Sesshomaru had straightened, and only had the for sight to shoot his right hand out in a defensive stance before Loki lunged at him and they both vanished. Tony fought the creeping desire in his lungs to shout out to Jarvis to get that tracking chip ready because he could feel that Loki hadn't taken them far, in fact he was pretty sure that Loki just transported them to...

Then Thor vanished in a puff of smoke. Yup England. Wait now...central park?

"What was that about?!" Steve asked and Tony was about to have a mental breakdown. Nat may have called him slow, but Steve was dial up Internet. He was do focused on Sesshomaru staying he didn't put together that he had fought this war before and died. Died.

Dead.

Gone.
But not this Sesshomaru. Not this one. Not his Sesshomaru.

"Connect the dots, Steve. Odin hid Thor and Loki so they wouldn't fight in the war that Fancy Pants and the Demons waged against Thanos 500 years ago. A war that Sesshomaru lost, and, well Loki isn't happy that after it all Odin lied to everyone and said that no one knew what happened to the Demons, including our Mr Nirvana." Clint explained, and Tony was glad that happened because his pulse was red-lining.

"Wait he lost this war before? Wat happened? How did they lose? How does this make any sense?" Steve was on his heels and this was news to Pepper too because she was tapping her heel nervously. Click. Click. Click.

"Yeah, look, I'm still not great at the details but Loki branched time. The time line we are in was the one that Fancy Pants died, Loki just time traveled him before the war started." Clint fumbled and Tony pursed his lips. He just had to say die didn't he?

Poof.

Green smoke poofed onto the screen along with an agitated Point Break. Thor's hair had been pulled out of his ponytail wildly and it looked like he had probably taken a swing at someone.

Poof.

Sesshomaru had Loki by his shirt and Loki had his arms gripping Sesshomaru's wrist.

"I'm alright. I've calmed down, you can let. go." Loki bit out, but it lacked his usual diva venom. Sesshomaru dropped him like a bad habit and fussed with his collar on his now wrinkled shirt.

Yeah. there was no way that he was the same one that died back then. He had changed here. He had to be stronger now that the other Shamshomaru that died five hundred years ago. He buzzed with more energy, and stared with the most vibrant, alertness of anyone he had ever met, not to mention sleep with.

"Ok, well, back to it. This means that Odin thought that you two weren't ready to fight Thanos before, right?" Steve concluded looking between a completely mental Loki and a fuming Thor.

"Worry not, even if you believe Allfather's assumption, my brother and I both have become much stronger and hardened warriors in the last half millennium. I am concerned about what Son of Taisho spoke of earlier though, the cosmic gem. Those are of almost unlimited power and can lay waste to galaxies whole." Thor mused and Loki snorted, his magic still writhing around like one of those inflated things outside used tire dealerships.

"Assumption indeed Thor. The Tesseract is but one of them, it houses the Space Gem." Loki gritted out, as if willing himself to not implode. "Sho. Was the Soul Gem the only ONLY the cosmic gem he came to Earth to find? I doubt very much it was the Tesseract or he would have left with it." Loki seethed, and Tony was beginning to think he was just a trigger away from really losing it.

Sesshomaru took the aviators off his head and absently cleaned them. As he nodded.

"Yes. My mother's parents managed to split the Soul Gem of the Greater Cosmos into two halves, one half resides in the pummel of Sounga. The other half is contained within the Meido stone that is currently in the possession of our enemy. Inside the Meido Stone are the souls of the deceased demons from before the war, such as Ryokustusei and Hakudoshi." Sesshomaru stepped forward, his voice deeply filled the room which usually calmed Loki. It didn't this time. Now he just started
"Brother! Do you think that's why Allfather feared The Sw—"

"Thor. SHUT. YOUR. INFERNAL. MAW! Sho…the scepter…the scepter mentioned The Mad Titan vowed to make the Soul Gem whole. Where is Sounga, that wicked blade?" Loki paced back and forth, finally his mind doing something other than trying to destroy his Tower. It took a whole mass of people to patch together Substorage 3-b after Loki's last meltdown.

"Sounga is safe." Sesshomaru calmly responded, but Tony bet even Point Break could tell Loki was going to press.

"Sesshomaru. Thanos, this Mad Titan, already has half of the Cosmic Gem, correct?" Steve sounded like he really, really had enough and looked around. "And he…apparently came to Earth five hundred years ago to get this Gem, and an army of Demons, then we need to know were, and we need to know WHAT a Sounga is." Steve crossed his massive arms in a 'don't even try' show of power.

Pause.

"Sounga is my birthright. It is a sword of tremendous nefarious power and ability. My mother hid it on the Astral Plane, well out of the Titan's grasp. It shall remain there." Sesshomaru eventually conceded and his voice took on a foreboding tone that Tony didn't miss. Tony also didn't miss that he didn't give Sounga a he or she pronoun. Hopefully that meant it wasn't going to come to life and be irritating.

"That's it. Oh, ho, ho, ho, ho….that's iiiiiiiit." Loki finally stopped going full workout mode and chuckled darkly. "That grating spirit Hakudoshi told me that the Other wished to capture either you or I, that it didn't need us both. The Mad Titan requires Sounga to complete the Soul Gem. He could easily unleash an army of spirits and possess the ones who oppose him with the full power of the Soul Gem. He can either abduct you to retrieve it for him since you are the only being alive that can spirit-walk to the Astral Plane, or he can imprison and force me to retrieve the Tesseract from Asgard to create a portal to the Astral Plane." Loki ran his hands manically through his hair like he wanted to put it up into one of those hipster man-bun travesties.

"In no realm shall I retrieve Sounga for the likes of that Titan." Moonie's voice sliced through the air and the temperature plummeted a good five degrees. Yeah, what he said.

"Brother, the Sword of Hell in the hands of Thanos cannot come to pass. It rivals Gungnir in strength. It surpasses even my Mjolnir and Son of Taisho's swords." Point Break was really on about this Sword of Hell. Like it was some sort of super weapon and it piqued Tony's interest some. Some. What happened next, really got him curious about Sounga because Bakusaiga next to him rattled in her sheath. Her. Damnit. Now even he was using the damn pronouns.

"What's so special about it? Sounga I mean. Point Break is acting like it can actually break him." Tony asked before he really thought about it.

"You mean aside from the fact it has the souls of an entire Demon army in it?" Clint sassed out. Bruce face palmed and Tony just groaned. Clint's dumb eyes went wide when he realized his slip-up. Good job there Legolas, we just got Horns off his over protective brother bender and now you had bring up his Demon army was stuck inside the Sword of Hell.

When Tony envisioned this team huddle this wasn't exactly what he had in mind.
"What? Your Demon soldiers' souls reside within Sounga?" Loki, damnit, now they were really off topic. Steve looked a sick shade of pale as well. He wanted to try to keep that from the All American Capsicle as well so his pretty head didn't implode. Too late.

"After the other Sesshomaru lost his duel with Thanos, my mother sealed my army's souls within Sounga to prevent them from being enslaved by Thanos. Odin spirited away their bodies to an undisclosed, distant, frozen realm." Sesshomaru tossed his hair as if he was saying he wanted skim milk in his latte.

You could have heard the pin to a grenade drop if Loki's magic didn't start snapping and crackling.

"Lord Sesshomaru, is Uncle Inuyasha frozen too?! What about Ah-Un?!" Rin asked, eyes wide and full of hope. It didn't really hit home for Tony that if Sesshomaru stayed here, so would Rin and Jaken. Tony knew that Rin had been orphaned at a young age, and left for dead, but it did sound like when Loki spirited them here that the left behind some people Rin obviously missed.

Sesshomaru nodded once. Wait his brother's soul was trapped in a sword? Was this a good or a bad thing?

Tony thanked his parents again for only procreating once.

Pause.

"Odin spirited the bodies away to a frozen realm...it couldn't be..." The blood drained from Loki's face and he was even paler than Sesshomaru.

"Brother, they must be frozen on Jotunheim! The rest of the Demons must be there!" Thor really needed to use his indoor voice through the speakers.

"He not only knew their demise... But he hid them from me...He never did trust me. And to think I almost destroyed them with the Bifrost...Never...wait. That is why Odin overreacted in Asgard when Thor, Romanoff, Rin and I returned. He fears that Sho will uncover the truth and awaken his Demon army and storm Asgard with the Jotuns for revenge." Loki was babbling something incoherent and probably something that wouldn't ever happen.

From what Tony could figure out about Sesshomaru by putting together his past and just getting to know him, was that he was fine NOT being saddled with the responsibility of leading an army. Honestly, if he really wanted command, he would have probably tried to pull rank by now. From the battle with the smaller Interceptor, and here, Sesshomaru just wanted to say his two cents and be left to do what he wanted.

Not thaw out a Demon hoarde and pick a fight with Thor's and Loki's dad over ruling Asgard.

"Odin is indeed a blind and deaf fool if he believes such actions from this Sesshomaru." Sesshomaru stated plainly and turned to Tony, eyes piercing. "Sounga is a weapon that can channel the power of the Demonic Underworld. Unlike the Meido Stone which opens portals to it, Sounga can call upon the Killing Intent of all the souls within the underworld, along with the soul claiming power of the underworld itself." Sesshomaru explained and Tony didn't really get... oh wait. No. He had heard of this before. Thor told him that Sesshomaru used his Killing Intent on Loki when Loki jumped him in the elevator. God that seemed like forever ago.

That Killing Intent though, definitely not something he would want used against him. Nat was rattled in a way he never thought he'd see again since Bruce. he also had a sneaking suspicion it might not just make people piss-their-pants afraid.
"This is troubling. I don't see how the Other could possibly have gotten so powerful to be using the Meido Stone. The Other is a powerful sorcerer, but magic directly opposes Youki. It should be impossible for him to summon or control a Demonic Spirit even with half the Soul Stone. Even opening portals to any underworld is near impossible to control…and just how does the Other know to bring forth Demon Spirits that know you personally? I didn't think The Other would have gleaned information about you in such detail from my memories, and I didn't know anything about this you wield both Sounga and the Meido stone if we must use it against The Mad Titan? " Loki started pacing again, manically talking to himself. At least Tony thought he was now talking to himself. Even Clint winced in concern. The horns unhinging process was beginning. He was going to create trenches in his floor he knew it.

"The Other is not in possession of the Meido Stone. Mephisto, my mother's former retainer, betrayed her and killed her after the other Sesshomaru was slain. Mephisto stole the Meido Stone and defected to The Mad Titan's army. This Sesshomaru believes that due to him being an Eternal Demon, like my mother, he has the ability to summon spirits, but he is far from adept at it."

Sesshomaru revealed and Thor sputtered in surprise.

"Brother was that not the Fire Demon who propositioned you by bringing you that rare Horse Demon?" Thor's grin was all sunshine. Oh man, so one of the enemies they had to face had it bad for Horns? Tony read the expression on Loki's face as: beyond irritated.

"Yes. Thor." Loki's face, purple with rage really amused Tony. He could take Thor as a brother-in-law easy.

"You know brother, that's probably how the mortals came up with the legend you sired Sleipnir, the eight legged horse!" Thor continued and this just kept getting better.

"THOR." Oh, Point Break was definitely going to make having Loki as a brother-in-law tolerable.

"Brother we all know that to be pure folly, I mean unless you decided to shape shift into a—" The feed on the holoprojector went to mute. Loki buzzkilled that before Clint could bust a nut in laughter. Even Nat smiled. Tony would have turned the volume back on but he could read Thor's lips just fine, as could pretty much anyone else in the room.

"Uncle Loki, what's 'sired' mean?" Little Miss Sunshine asked in that innocent way that Tony just had to mess with.

Except Pepper gave him THAT look.

Then Polly decided to say something in Japanese to Little Miss Sunshine and her eyes got as wide as dinner plates. Great, not only was the first thing she said in a language he didn't understand, but she got to mess with his future stepdaughter and he couldn't. This wasn't fair.

Loki's magic sparked green around his fingers. This guy couldn't be laid back if you plopped him a hammock in Fiji. Clint was rocking back and forth on his heels. At least Clint kept his sense of humor. Legolas, really, wasn't so bad when he wasn't trying to protect Bambi from getting his ego bruised.

Tony didn't miss the slight smirk on Sesshomaru's soft lips. Tony hoped this stupid meeting could end soon so he could pester Sesshomaru about all this business with Sounga and then fiddle around with the scepter and The Other's magic. If he could figure Loki's out, how hard could The Other's be?

"Back to the topic at hand…there are different bloodlines of Demons? I am assuming you can also
control the Meido Stone if it came to it. Sounga as well." Loki crept closer to his fiance and Tony's protective nature got the better of him and he sidestepped to Sesshomaru side. He didn't like Loki's fucking tone.

Sesshomaru gaze darted to Tony, as if recognizing and thanking his backup.

"My… " Sesshomaru trailed off and Tony's blood embered over in fire. Loki put him on the spot to talk about something he wasn't ready to talk about in front of everyone. Didn't Loki get it that Sesshomaru hated talking in front of big groups of people, especially about himself?

Tony was just about to go tell Loki to go to hell when Sesshomaru grabbed his wrist. He must have projected his move.

"My lineage is…not of most Demons. My mother informed me that beings called Celestials tampered with the bloodlines of Demons long ago to create two bloodstrains. The Deviants my father's bloodline, composed the vast majority of the Demons. The Eternals, my mother's bloodline, had almost all died out by the time I was conceived. I concluded only those of Eternal bloodline can utilize the power of the Meido stone, and only those of the Deviant bloodline can wield Sounga. I am both, thus yes, I can master both the Meido Stone and Sounga." Sesshomaru explained and Loki's face darkened into a knowing look. Loki knew something about this bloodline business. Horns was definitely scheming something and Tony had a feeling it was going to be another colossal pain in the ass.

"OK, I may not know a lot about what you're talking about, but I know about high priority targets, which is you two." Steve stepped in. "Which means we will have to keep you two double covered. I may not fully understand this… Demon blood and soul business, but I do know that the last thing our enemy needs is to get his hands on a sword that can possess them." Cap managed to lasso the group back and Natasha nodded.

"Yes, which is precisely why Sho and I will fight the Mad Titan separately. One us will engage the ailing Atheon and the other the Nycteus." Loki recovered, smirking darkly like he already had a super irritating plan which was something Tony didn't remotely approve of.

"They won't be engaging us in tandem? Do you have an idea of where they are now and where they will go?" Nat finally spoke up.

"The Aethon is stalled on the far side of the moon undergoing repairs. I was unable to scry the other vessels, yet it would be practical to have the two most similarly constructed vessels hidden together for support." Sesshomaru admitted which surprised Tony and the rest of the room because he definitely didn't tell him he scryed the ship.

"You were most likely unable to scry them not due to any fault of your own, but because the Mad Titan's armada is utilizing my own blood magic for its stealth and shields." Loki revealed and Tony straightened. The torture. Did they…. torture Loki to get the secrets of his magic just like the hand did to him with getting a weapon?

It made sense though, how effective little green was against the shields of the ship.

A shiver went down Tony's sides. Did he seriously share the exact same sob story as his future 'bother' in law? On top of the world, fall from grace, tortured for his weapons, escaped only to have to deal with his demons later? LITERAL Demons? How poetic.

"...The Mad Titan is using your own magic against us, Glow Stick?" Nat's voice could smelt steel. Clint's face lost all of his color and Tony smelled an illtimed emotional reaction incoming in five…
four…three…two…one….

"Loki, they…." Tony cut him off. Not only because Clint just was about to derail their conversation further, but also because he knew the last thing Loki would want is to be a spectacle like this.

"Did what we all knew already happened. Let's stay on target. The ship's are using Loki's magic, which as we already know is countered by youki. If we fire the youki capsules I've already made at the Aethon and the Nycteus, with some weapons I can create, wham bam, we got shields down." Tony announced, he already had it practiced. He had extra ones (and yes he knew Loki had pilfered the ones he had already made which made him hide the toxins, Cerberus, Sirius, and Blitzen down where Loki's magic couldn't easily detect them, the scepter room. Also coincidently the most secure room in the tower.

"Sho being present in this time has had severe consequences for The Mad Titan, one of which is that a faction within the Mad Titan's own armada has begun to defect against him." Loki paused and Tony was thankful for the change of the subject. It was making his skin itch. "The Mad Titan striking a deal with you insignificant lot makes little sense… but a faction within the Mad Titan's armada bent on defying him, that would be more plausible." Loki whirled his fancy magic around and showed the blue figure and the shorty white haired Demon Spirit who carved up Loki like a turkey.

"I uncovered that Nebula, a cybernetically enhanced luphomoid daughter of The Mad Titan and her partner, Hakodoshi a supposed Demon Spirit from Sho's Era, are working with someone higher up in the armada's ranks. Together with the rogue faction within SHIELD the aimed to retrieve the scepter to mutany against the Mad Titan. They aspire to use the Other's scepter against him, the Mad Titan wouldn't have have dared show his hand this early for a mere toy of the Other. Their entire mission in Shanghai was a mere feint against the Mad Titan, which we thwarted." Loki grinned thinly, magic showing the Aethon in detail.

Tony's brain Ignited. Justin Hammer was worming around somewhere in the shadows and Tony would find him and ruin his life for this.

"So, the rebel faction in SHIELD wasn't working with Thanos, they bet that the rebel faction would defeat Thanos over us and the rest of Earth's forces." Nat stepped forward and poor Cap never looked more confused.

"How did this even happen? How could the Mad Titan just let this mission go forward if he never approved it?" Cap asked the question Tony wanted to ask. Bambi and Point Break had puffed up this Space Warlord as big badass and he had an entire spaceship go AWOL and didn't do anything about it?

"The Demon Spirit informed me that The Mad Titan approved it as a measure to lure me out of hiding. His priority, as we all now know, is the completion of the Soul Gem and reclaiming the Tesseract." Loki said and now this really wasn't making sense. Why would the enemy just tell them all of this?

"And you just believe this Demon Spirit? Why would he tell you all of this? I smell something rotten." Brucey finally spoke up, and yeah Tony more than agreed with him.

"I concur brother, we have encountered many devious Demons before. Many cannot be trusted, we cannot believe what he has to say." Thor boomed across the speakers and Tony winced a little because now it came across that they didn't trust Demons in general and well….
The room fell into an awkward silence before his drop dead gorgeous fiance shifted. He wanted nothing more than to just get out of here with him, get a really good steak and a...

"It would be wise to consider what Hakudoshi stated as truth if he had a self serving motive for doing so." Sesshomaru stated smoothly and Loki straightened, instantly vindicated.

Of course his Fiancé would want to believe the psycho Demon Spirit who almost murdered his best friend. He said it before, he was never simple.

"Heed my Lord's words! Hakudoshi was an incarnation of Naraku, and as such was created to do Naraku's bidding. Lord Sesshomaru never interacted with that cowardly Demon, but that distasteful Inuyasha had! Hakudoshi would tell him about his plans to defy and betray Naraku due to his own arrogance and selfish reasons. If Hakudoshi hated being controlled by Naraku, he would positively hate being controlled by this Mephisto. And if he bragged about his plans, he probably did it to get something out of it!" Jaken shook that staff at Bruce like an old woman with a cane.

Wow...he was really holding all of that in. Maybe he should go set Cap's punching bag on fire again.

"Alright going off Jaken, so SHIELD's rogue faction, and that massive tool Justin Hammer who made the destroyer guns, is helping Thanos' rogue faction. I think I'm going to go ahead and put out there that the enemy of my enemy...is NOT our friend. I know I've never been the paragon of a team player, but this is a firm NO. So, no one better be getting any ideas about cozying up to children of the corn and robo-smurfette." Tony, hands itching for something to do, decided to make yet another cup of coffee. He also sensed another one of Cap's speeches coming on. He had been pretty quiet when Loki and his super hot fiancé decided to talk about blood, souls, swords and other things best left to devil worshippers or Aztec sacrificial rituals.

"They certainly don't see us as allies either. They both see us as pawns on a chessboard at best." Loki insisted, and Tony had to count that as a win that he didn't have to fight Reindeer Games on this.

"I'd like nothing more than to turn albino chucky into chalk dust." Clint picked up his fancy gold bow, no doubt something Bambi gave him as some sort of prize for putting up with him. It was gaudy enough to go with that silk kimono he had. Maybe he could somehow convince Clint to take it...no wait. Then he and Sesshomaru would match. Not happening.

"And here in this very room you led me to believe you didn't want a magic bow, Cupid." Natasha smirked and Tony then remembered that.

"I forgot about Cupid..." Tony mused to himself.

"Great. Thanks Nat. And the bow, which...has a name, Ichiaval, and yeah I know I made fun of Fancy Pants for the same thing. But, this bow is how I'm going to powder these Demon Spirits. Fancy Pants isn't the only one who can kill them." Clint picked up the bow and it glowed a faint purple. Tony raised an eyebrow, that was a game changer.

"Lord Sesshomaru! That archer is a Priest?!" Jaken jumped next to him. OK so this wasn't only news to him.

"Loki's protection magic, like the Magic Gate's magic to this Sesshomaru, awoke his long dormant purification gifts. It is as Barton says, he can purify Demons, and Demonic spirits." Sesshomaru nodded once.
Purify Demons? Could Clint purify Sesshomaru?

No. Clint couldn't even pick out matching clothes.

"Perfect." Steve slammed his hand down on the counter. Oh yeah, Capsicle must be chomping at the bit to get the meeting back under control. "Then if the ships go to two separate locations, we can easily split our forces and not have to worry about Loki cutting himself open, which was… pretty unhygienic to say the least." Steve got all tall and straight, getting back into his groove. He had his serious voice on.

"Sho and I have discussed where the Aethon and the Nycteus will most likely strike. The Nycteus, the undamaged vessel will attack this realm's most important military target, and the Aethon will go after a city of great governmental significance, simultaneously of course." Loki, in true diva fashion, magicked together two incredibly recognizable targets.

"Norfolk, Virginia, the largest naval base in the world, and Washington, DC makes sense. Plausible definitely. Good thinking, but those aren't the only critical targets Earth has. How positive are you about this Loki?" Steve assessed the magic and Tony had enough of being shown up in his own living room so he also brought up some screens showing Norfolk and the carriers stationed there, along with photos of DC and its current weather and people of importance.

"There are other targets we could consider, but we also can incentivize the Mad Titan into those two locations." Loki led and Tony's stomach soured.

"You two will act as bait, one at Norfolk, the other in DC." Steve pointed to Sesshomaru who was busy fussing with his aviators, as if this wasn't important at all. "Well, I have to say it's solid strategically, and I will have the final decision on who is stationed where." Tony took a sip of the coffee that finished brewing.

"It might be smart to have Loki in DC, especially after China's president stated publicly that they wanted Loki to be China's own 'Alien Protector' and me as far away from any civilian populace as if I'm in Norfolk with Sesshomaru, he can help me in case I lose control." Bruce spoke up, wincing.

Oh yeah, Loki preening himself after he saved Shanghai definitely almost caused an international incident. Xi Jinping stated in one of their super boring, assemblies that since the United States hadn't officially endorsed Loki as one of Earth's defenders that they would endorse him as China's defender. Poor, Poor Rhodey had to deal with that aftermath. The United States, had to officially align with SHIELD and state that Loki, the guy who killed hundreds of people in New York, was actually one of Earth's Defenders.

That went real smooth. Rhodey called him and gave him an earful, well not really he put him on while he was jamming to Iron Maiden in the gym.

"Right, that settles it. We will have Loki, Thor, Clint, Tony, and myself in DC, and Sesshomaru, Bruce, Jaken, and Natasha in Norfolk. If Rhodes is willing to suit up as well, he will be in DC with Tony and I." Tony choked on his coffee. Did Steve really think he was going to not fight alongside his fiancé in what was probably going to be the quarterfinals of the battle for the end of the world.

"Lord Sesshomaru! I get to fight alongside you once more!" Jaken jumped around and Sesshomomaru immediately straighted, placing his stupid aviators back on his stupid perfect hair. Hair he wanted to run his fingers through again.

This was when Moonie was going to tell Cap his idea of splitting them up was as stupid as Loki's
leather pants.

"Jaken is a Water Demon, not a Sea Demon. Jaken knows not of this Norfolk, but he cannot assume his true form in seawater, only fresh water. I am assuming a city of great importance such as this DC has a river running through it." Sesshomaru nodded and Tony just about dropped his coffee. Was his prissy Demon Lord saying he was OK with the seating arrangements for this dinner party of hell for him being in DC, but not Jaken?

He wasn't going to bring up that they weren't fighting alongside each other?

Well, if Sesshomaru thought he was better off on his own, or too good to be on the same field as him then fine. If he wasn't going to fight for them, then he wasn't about to. If he needed his damn space he could have it.

"The Anacostia and the Potomac both run through it, and that will make more sense if we have a Demon at each location that can damage their shields. With the aircraft carriers and additional military presence in Norfolk, we need more of us in DC." Steve gestures to the whole room and Tony pursed his lips, forcing the blood out of them. Steve wasn't wrong, but Tony still didn't have to like any of this.

Another wash of anxiety pricked through his lungs. He really didn't like this at all. What if he couldn't figure out the Other's magic in time? What if the youki capsules he crafted weren't enough? Could he get to Sesshomaru in time before something happened?

What if he got captured? He almost was the last time and he cut through his restraints. He was almost blown to hell and back in the Quinjet because of Clint. OK, that wasn't fair, that wasn't on Clint.

What if Sesshomaru did something stupid and reckless? He promised he wouldn't, but with Bruce hulking out... And have he and Natasha even spoken to each other since the whole Killing Intent thing?

Nat and Loki chatted a lot, they were scary close. Probably should watch out for that.

"Pepper, it would be a huge help if you could stay here in the Tower. You know the systems and we need a pair of eyes here incase Tony's satellite detector—" Tony cut Steve off.

"Uh D.E.M.O.N.S at least get the name right. Acronyms don't write themselves, and this one has so much more panache than SHIELD." Tony forced a quip and a smirk. He wasn't going to let Moonie get to him.

"Tony. Panache. Really?" Pepper scolded him. He was right; it had a lot more panache! And since when did Pep really care about cutting off Capcicle? It wasn't that life or death.

"Tony, I think we're past 'panache' this is the fate of the world, not the fate of your ego." Wow. Ok. Was everyone in this room against him? It wasn't do or die yet. Something dark and thunderous resounded in Tony's chest. Again everyone was against anything he had to do say or do with, even the little shit that was really supposed to be funny. "We could really use your help, Pepper, in case D.E.M.O.N.S picks up any more ships. And..." Steve's gaze landed on Polly. "And if you're present then you can be useful and you can...look after Rin here in the tower. We can use all the help we can get, and if Sesshomaru, Bruce, Nat, and Clint trust you, well, I am willing to extend that trust to you as well." Stars and Stripes of course figured out a way to be all honorable and heroic so Tony couldn't call him out on making him feel like an ass. Tony put down his coffee mug and stretched abruptly. He needed some damn space from the Demon Lord who obviously wanted
"Me?! I'm in?! I'm an Avenger?!” Polly probably needed new pants after that scream. Nat across the room snorted.

"Um…not exa—" Steve failed at getting control of that situation.

"I can go get my taser! Oh, and my mace, and my luck—” Pepper put a hand on the surprisingly peppy goth kid. Maybe she was more activist than broody.

"We got it covered, why don't I show you around with Rin? I don't think you've gotten a tour yet.” Polly's eyes lit up like she was going to Disneyworld, but Tony knew Pep wouldn't take them anywhere he didn't want them to be.

At least…well. He hoped so.

"With that…I think we have covered everything. I think everyone can do whatever it is they need to do…Oh Thor." Steve paused. They totally forgot to unmute the big guy. He was just gaping and…probably knocking the laptop around due to the shaking. Dr. Foster is going to be pleased about that. Tony switched him back on just in time to see Dr. Foster's coffee retriever…Daphne? Appear on screen wearing….of course face paint.


"Omg it is him! Thor I TOLD YOU to tell me when he showed up! Hey, like my handiwork? I actually went out and bought eyeliner for this in a color that isn't black.” Darcy now had completely smashed her face up into the webcam and Tony couldn't help but roll his eyes. Sesshomaru shifted his weight.

"Lord Sesshomaru, that one loud human has painted themselves like you! What vile behavior! You have disrespected my Lord!” Ugh now Jaken was all riled up. Perfect. He should have just left Thor on mute.

"And to think not even a week ago you wanted me to replace them with your father's." Loki sniped and Tony didn't know exactly what he meant by that but it earned a chill in the air from Sesshomaru.

"Hey, this took me like an hour to match the stripes up, if you want to see real disrespect, go on Insta, there are some slaggy looking moons on there. Some people even did them backwards. There's a whole community now, there is even a Snapchat filter, but I personally think that's cheating.” Delilah rambled on in just the way that Tony could easily turn into white noise. Tony wouldn't have been surprised if this coffee gopher did the makeup while on the clock. She didn't look like the type to scream productivity.

"There's a snapchat filter of Mr Mysterious?!” Polly's voice carried through the tower. Oh no he was shutting this down.

"Yeah, it even gives you the slit gold eyes…creepy yet pretty…no offense. Mr Nirvana….speaking of that… I saw your super swanky meet and greet. You totally brought back the white suit and even silver hair. It's all over GQ magazine. Some model recruiter Jason Sisson apparently broke it wide open what you were going to wear before and it's gone viral since. You looked good, well until you bled all over it. Crazy they are still trying to catch those guys who shot you…But hey what do I know…except you mentioned you were going to see Dave Grohl for a drink or possibly date…You don't think I could get in on that do you? I mean, I don't even have to say anything, I
can just…BE there. You probably wouldn't even notice me, I can blend in anywhere. One time Ja —"

"Darcy! What did I…this is serious! Thor why didn't you stop her?" Dr. Foster to the rescue. Jason Sisson, Tony knew he had heard that name before…wait…was this guy who has been dressing Sesshomaru?

Oh. It was on. Tony knew fashion and knew how to dress. He just assumed….wait what did he assume? That Sesshomaru just happened to know Armani? That Pepper was shopping for him all this time?

This day just kept getting better and better. Now they had to have another talk. When would these stupid talks end? Is this what he really wanted? To have to deal with Horns, Legolas, and Point Break as brothers in law? Deal with weirdo fangirls painting their faces to look like him? Some model stalking him for a catwalk exclusive? Him assaulting a space cruiser that he couldn't actually assault without his whole arm ripping apart with some sorcerer's name carved into it?!

"I thought it was a flattering tribute to Son of Taisho." Thor smiled. Tony almost believed him. Nat nudged Loki and pointed. A swirl of green magic coiled around Loki's finger.

It was then Sesshomaru's markings appeared on Thor….and it was awful and terrible and holy god why was this happening?

"Ok, you wear them better than me. Not fair, I'm taking a photo for blackmail purposes…and for my blog." Darlene or whoever is now definitely not getting anywhere near Sesshomaru if she is going to blog about him. Tony was pretty certain that Sesshomaru hadn't figured out the internet yet, which along with it was social media. It was one of Tony's priorities to keep him out of the limelight if at all possible.

Tony himself of course didn't mine the attention for the most part, but he wasn't going to make a spectacle out of his prissy, recluse Demon Lord. Well, more of a spectacle than he had already made himself. Tony wasn't jealous that ironman wasn't made into snapchat filter, he was the only Ironman. Posers could shelve it.

Thor pawed at his face when he saw the photo that Diandra took.

"Brother! This is a serious meeting, and you're making light of it." Thor had a shit eating grin plastered on his face. Tony smirked when Steve literally facepalmed.

"Are my markings something of a joke to you, Storm God?" Sesshomaru squared up to the screen and cracked his knuckles. Tony could tell that the big Priss was just messing with Point Break. He wasn't wound that tight, at least not anymore. Maybe at first…but he had actually mellowed out a bit.

Tony didn't think Thor realized just how calm he had gotten however.

"A joke, of course not, but I do think they are a bit….dainty for me. They suit you far better." Thor just signed his life away. Everyone in the room tensed. Even Nat.

"I wouldn't expect someone of your intellect to comprehend stature doesn't always indicate strength." Sesshomaru, to everyone's shock, actually bantered back. Jaken fell over, white as a sheet. Was…was Sesshomaru MESSING with Thor?

Now. This was definitely proof Moonie had lost some of his prickliness. Before when he first met him, he would have probably melted something with his toxin. Or attacked Thor. Or both. Yeah,
probably both.

"I do believe that I still had one win over you in the melees we had." Thor actually was gunning for him now. Oh man, it was definitely a good thing that Thor was on a completely separate continent. Not that it would stop those two from a grudge match anyway.

"After we defeat this Titan, I shall even the score." Sesshomaru lengthened his talon and the slightest smirk was at the corner of his lips. Loki rolled his eyes and grumbled something as the markings vanished. Whatever Nat and Loki had tried to do obviously backfired because Point Break and Sesshomaru definitely just had a quintessential 'bro' moment.

"You have wagered with Loki! Say this, if you win the Melee bout, I shall do something in recompense, if I win the melee bout you shall….purchase me three kegs of my choice of beer." Oh Shwarma this was getting interesting. Tony though didn't think this was all fun and games for Thor though. He wasn't being just funny here. The guy could read a room when he wanted to. Tony scratched the back of his neck, Thor wasn't just tying to lighten the mood, he was trying to bond with Moonie.

Why was he trying to do that?

"I accept your wager. When I am the victor you shall purchase me a motorcycle of my choosing." Sesshomaru announced that with a straight face. Did he know that three kegs worth of beer didn't exactly equal what a motorcycle cost? Did Thor? Did either of them have any concept of money? Did either of them care?

Has Thor done a keg stand?

Clint burst out laughing. Oh yeah, they raced Ducatis together. Big deal. He could buy the company Ducati itself if he wanted to.

"I accept. This shall be a most vigorous test of mettle!" Someone should have probably stopped them, but Tony couldn't because Sesshomaru's ears were up juuuuust a hair and his shoulders were back. Tony could immediately tell he was stoked about this melee thing, and well, honestly he was kinda intrigued at what a 'melee' match meant. As much as he wanted to see Thor do a kegstand, he'd much rather see his persnickety fiancé and Thor squabble at a Ducati dealership and the look on Thor's face when they didn't accept mead a payment.

"Thor we are going to have to have a talk about gambling on fights. And Darcy, we are going to have a talk on when's appropriate to fangirl and not fangirl over some guy from Nirvana." Tony didn't envy Dr. Foster. She had to put up with Thor destroying everything and Lo…oh. Wait they had Loki in common. Maybe this is what a family was supposed to resemble. Tony scratched his neck.

Family.

Pending they all survived this war, one small insignificant detail. Really.

Family. God he was a family man.

"…Oh my god, did you have a childhood, or were you just born adulting? And you have heard of the Foo Fighters right? Wait, have you been to an actual concert?" Ok this had officially gone off the rails. Tony grappled onto Sesshomaru's wrist and immediately a tingle trickled up his arm. Tony didn't know if he was frustrated or turned on or both.
Agitation prickled the base of his skull. He thought he was sure. Certain. Completely 100% positive and now...now he just needed to talk through this. AGAIN.

If Pepper suggested couples counseling to them he might just lose it.

He took Sesshomaru back into his lab, the bedroom...too risky. He might get frisky and he also had replenished his secret scotch stash and fuck the coffee he needed something stronger for all of this. He let go of Sesshomaru's slim wrist almost reluctantly as he crossed over and reached under and got the...GIN? Did he...did he really replace it with GIN?

Fine.

He was losing his mind before the end of the world over what kind of liquor he had in his lab because a Demon Lord had Loki for a brother, a damn model recruiter for a personal shopper...and would rather fight a spaceship without him.

Didn't he get that he was sacrificing a lot too? He'd have to be a father of some sort, he'd have to put up with LOKI and even Clint and Thor as family. He'd have to basically forfeit his free time as he knew it. He'd have to do actual couple-y shit that he hadn't really figured out yet, like maybe effectively communicate. And that was if they survived the whole battle for the fate as humanity as they knew it.

And Sesshomaru, cool as a fucking ice-pond in Siberia, Demon Lord, was ok with him fighting a spaceship, that he couldn't really fight against because of the curse, basically solo. Yeah, Bruce and Nat would be there, but they didn't have long distance weaponry. Sure he'd give them the youki capsules but that was besides the point. Either Sesshomaru thought he could do better without him, or...

Maybe he just didn't give a fuck if he got blown away. Maybe he didn't want the responsibility of having his back.

"Stark. You're tense, and anxious. Does the current strategy we have in place not sit well with you?" Sesshomaru spoke first and damnit his eyebrows slanted in confusion. His lips softened as well, Moonie had read him like a book. He poured out some gin into an almost clean glass.

Tony didn't get how he could go into the meeting so SURE of everything and now just want to break everything.

"Um, what about it do you think sits well with me? You can't bring down the shields on the ships even though everyone, save maybe Natasha, thinks you can. And you're going up against it without enough back up. What if Bruce loses it when he hulks out and you can't Steve Irwin some sense into him? What if I can't find out how to break this curse before these ships show up? What if the firepower of the cruisers and the f-22s we have aren't enough to give you cover fire and you get blown away while I am fully covered in DC and I cant....I can't have your back." The usually unstoppable Tony rant train had pattered to a sad pushcart of angst. God when had he gotten so lame? So soft?

"This Sesshomaru had thought you wished it this way, that you had previously discussed this with your Captain." Sesshomaru's placid voice carried a hint of surprise to it. Tony leaned back. He hadn't thought about that. He also didn't think about how Sesshomaru may have thought he was alright with it. "Nevertheless, I believe this is the right tactic for a few reasons." Sesshomaru put a curled finger to his lips like he always did when he was thinking about something.

"Oh. Why's that?" This had better be good. Tony almost took the swig of Gin straight.
"Our mating ritual is incomplete. I do not know how this will affect me in combat if you become imperiled. It may result in me doing something rash like transform. I require...time to test this out. In addition, Storm God and Loki currently do not communicate well, they will probably need your assistance to aid them in fighting alongside each other effectively. Barton would be far too biased, and the Captain and Loki are far too dissimilar. Also, as a public figure, you are most needed in a civilian city to be seen, and I would rather better understand your realm's military defenses." Sesshomaru took a few gliding steps towards Tony and he lost all momentum.

He had really thought this out and Tony just...sort of made a snap judgment. He still didn't like it, but he had some points. Not that he was going to...

Oh ok, he was now standing right in front of him. He smelled like the air right before a thunderstorm and his skin tingled like it too. The hair on the back of his neck stood on end.

"Worry not about this arrangement, Stark, trust in me." Sesshomaru's slit eyes burned like candles and dammit yeah. Something deep, hidden and almost forgotten cracked open in his chest. For a crazy moment, all he wanted Sesshomaru to do was to hold him. He wasn't about to just collapse into his arms like some damsel, but he really did trust him. He did. Tony swore he did he just...

"I do trust you. I just don't..." What? Trust the enemy? No shit. "think this is a fair play for you Bruce and Nat. It's not balanced." It was true, it wasn't balanced at all. Didn't Cap see that?

"There may be something to tip the scales in my favor." Sesshomaru's eyes gleamed. What did he know? Did he figure out the curse?

"What? The curse? New outfit? Which by the way, I am taking you shopping. That Jason Guy whoever he is, is not allowed to be your personal shopper." Tony could never stay on topic for long. Sesshomaru sighed through his nose and closed those crimson eyelids of his. Could they just have makeup sex now?

"Loki informed me, before the meeting, that a certain...friend of mine is amongst the enemy's ranks. Knowing her well, I can ascertain that she is repulsed by a Fire Demon attempting to lord his power over her. I intend on speaking with her, as I am sure she will seek me out." Sesshomaru's voice held a lilt of humor in it. Why did he get the feeling he was talking about some sort of ex girlfriend?

"Oh god, don't tell me that Mephisto guy, who apparently has it bad for Loki, bad judgment call there, brought back an ex girlfriend of yours." Tony huffed. Could this get any worse.

"Hardly. Kagura and I were merely...friends." Friends with benefits Tony guessed. Well, like he could talk. His list of slam pieces could fill the Vietnam war memorial wall. Tony eyed the gin. He didn't need it anymore. He was...better. OK. Maybe talking did help a bit. He still felt a bit off kilter but who wouldn't after all this.

"Yeah, fine. Chat up your ex to see if she can defect with us, and not the other defectors...god this is complicated. All of it. Us." Tony didn't mean that last part. Really. Well, he did. They were complicated but he didn't mean for it to come out that way. He didn't want Sesshomaru to think that now everything was ambiguous the morning after he accepted his proposal. That definitely didn't start things out on the right foot.

Sesshomaru blinked.

"Stark." Sesshomaru went for his neck and grazed his fangs down his throat. That got his attention. "You indicated to me while bathing that you didn't like simple. Have you changed your mind?"
Tony could tell by the tone of his voice, and the way those lips grazed his neck that Sesshomaru was fucking with him.

"Never." The word was out of Tony's mouth before he thought it through. But he didn't need to. He could handle this. He got it. He was worth it. He may not know if he loved him yet or not. Incredibly backward, but Tony did know one thing.

Together, they could do this.

Chapter End Notes

WOW. OK this chapter was a bear to eke out but we definitely needed a recap chapter to set everything up for the next bout!

I started another fic, both should update monthly.

thank you again for all your support :) next chapter is going to be a dooooolooy.

-TL
"Well, we know that magic and youki are direct opposites, but what I don’t get is why Legolas, who now has magic, can see the spirits, and you, Horns, can't." After he abruptly left the meeting with Sho in tow, obviously to discuss yet another miscommunicated issue between the two of them, Stark had returned to the living room to talk to him and Clint.

Loki wanted to roll his eyes. Deeply. Far into the back of his head.

"You’re…mostly correct. Magic has different purposes. My magic, at least up until recently, was centered around misdirection, illusion, and deception. Pure magic has one singular goal, to target Youki and to dispel impurities that youki destroys. You said yourself youki is positively charged and harms mortals. The most viable weapon that the mortals had were the priests and priestesses that harnessed pure magic. It is why that spectrum of magic can see spirits, and my magic cannot." Loki had truly hoped this would appease Stark and they would let them go about their business.

Loki was in NO mood to be explaining something an adolescent on Asgard would already know.

Loki’s blood itched for a spar. Or rough sex.

Odin had lied to him about a great many things, this was not news to him.

However, Odin lied to him for CENTURIES about the fate of his closest friend, then prevented him from saving his life by stranding him on Alfheim. Not only that, he lied to him about knowing where at least SOME of the remaining Demons were, and masked his real reasons for Thor being so enraged by storming Jotunheim, causing his exile on Midgard.

Odin wasn’t that irate about Thor blundering into a situation he couldn't get out of by inciting war with Jotunheim. Oh no, he was worried they would find the frozen Demons on Jotunheim while they battled!

Him using the Bifrost as a weapon and shattering the ice prison that housed the Demons had worried Odin far more than the fall of King Laufey.

Odin didn’t just lie to Loki this time, he lied to Thor as well. It slowly began to dawn on Thor, when he pulled him and Sho from the meeting in for their little chit-chat, how pervasively he had betrayed them.

Odin watched from afar as GENOCIDE occurred. The genocide his best friend’s RACE that he had valiantly led the prevention of! In Loki’s point of view, he may as well been an accessory in its undertaking. And of all people, Sho was the one telling him to calm down!

But Sho didn't understand that Odin had pledged to be the protectorate of Midgard and its inhabitants. He couldn't simply cherry-pick which inhabitants survived, and Loki was sure that mortals must have too perished in this war. It could not have seen only Demons as its casualties. Odin had failed to even lift a single finger for a realm he vowed was under Asgard’s protection!
“Perfect. That means we can use Cupid’s purple mojo to create a containment field for the magic spirits, or at least a visibility fence so we can see them and who knows, maybe even exorcise them, banish? Ghostbust them?” Stark, with a predictable ostentatious flourish, brought up his various holograms, revealing a blueprint of some sort.

“You think you can really make a containment field for spirits…using my new magic?” Clint sounded skeptical and Loki shared the sentiment. Demonic spirits were not to be underestimated, and they could vary between extremely strong and quite weak if Ryokutsusei and Hakudoshi were any indicator. It definitely could not be relied upon.

“I don’t even know what I’m doing with it Tony. I can’t even control when it happens. I don’t think you’re going to be able to help me stabilize it, much less make other people see these things.” Clint sighed and oddly, an itching sensation flooded Loki’s chest. The itch to comfort Clint. He didn’t particularly need it. Loki just had the impulse to whisk him away from all of this.

“Oh ye of little faith…rather science. You’re talking to the man who made an Early Warning Line to detect a stealth alien armada. Go ahead, fire an arrow off with that bow that could put fully chrome lambos to shame.” Stark gestured to Ichaival as if it were just some gaudy accessory. Now, Loki wasn’t about to say the golden bow wasn’t a bit fancy, it just also so happened to be a terrific conduit for magic.

Ichaival had the ability to fire bolts made entirely of the magic signature and energy of its wielder. It needed no physical arrows, it simply launched magic energy. Loki could never control it well, Ichaival seemed very reluctant to respond. He’d simply get too… angry? Frustrated? He didn’t know, he also couldn’t trust the memory as one that was true due to the other. He couldn’t even remember when or how he acquired it. Odin seldom used it, yes, but how did he not know it was missing from the armory?

Loki didn’t have answers, but he did know that Clint could most likely make use of the bow. It made sense and Ichaival literally warmed to Clint being an incredibly skilled archer.

“The guy who flies around in a gold and red suit of armor is calling me gaudy? Now I know the apocalypse is upon us. I haven’t even tested this bow yet, but… Yeah, let’s see what this thing can do.” Clint strode to the weapons cabinet and Loki watched his ass each step before stopping him.

“You don’t use physical arrows with Ichaival. It channels your very magic energy into an arrow.” Loki explained, hopefully not too condescendingly. He didn’t want to sound too uppity with Clint, but he just needed space and this wasn’t it. Loki knew he was on the brink of exploding and doing something or saying something sharp and wicked and he’d rather it not be Clint. He’d rather be anywhere else, but he couldn’t just….leave.

Could he?

His fingers twitched and he pursed his lips. He needed to get out of here. Wait, how did he swing from wanting to comfort Clint to wanting to be away from him?

“It makes its own arrows? No need for ammo, that’s great.” Clint smiled and he loved it. But. He was losing it. Maybe it was the scepter. Maybe it was his hatred of Odin bubbling back up. Like the scepter had been right all along to draw this hatred of him. The Other manipulated him, yes. He would flay him open like a goat at a feast, of course. But, how much of this hatred did the Other create, and how much had just always been there?

“It draws on your magic reserves, it ceases to fire when your reserves run too low.” Loki half explained. It didn’t require a full explanation because he wouldn’t allow Clint to fall to any danger
where it would be put in a position to use Ichaival too recklessly. Odin could use Ichaival tirelessly. Odin.

Yet...Maybe the Other wasn't wrong in sprouting the seeds of hatred he had for Odin. He was a weapon, and maybe after he killed the Other, he could turn himself on Odin too. He stood up to Odin's magic with his own branch of Yggdrasil. Maybe it was enough. Maybe he could wait, and plot and scheme and find a way to weaken Odin and then finally finish him off.

"Best news I've heard in a while. I won't have to worry about running low on ammo." Clint smiled earnestly and Loki caught himself returning it. Thor could have Asgard. He was more than ready. The truth of the matter was that Thor had somewhat matured and while Thor didn't quite realize it yet, he didn't need Loki's help. Yes, before he fell from the Bifrost this could not have been further from his stance, but it's not like his opinions ever really mattered anyway.

Not like he'd really survive this war to see Thor sit upon it anyway.

Clint pulled back the iridescent bow string and it glowed a vibrant, stellar violet. The whole bow glowed with a purification magic that Loki had believed had been extinct for centuries.

Loki forgot to breathe, feeling a niche, arcane magic flourish in Clint made him secretly still in awe. It was odd, because in most other circumstances Loki would have felt extreme envy or jealousy over someone picking up a most fickle magic with such ease with aid, but here, he just felt pride.

Yes. That was his partner who could generate a purification arrow in Ichaival. Loki doubted there was any other being in the galaxy who could, not even Odin. Oh and how Odin probably wished he could...

An equally exquisite violet arrow, unfocused and shaky, wild appeared in the bow. Loki noticed Sesshomaru's youki on instinct spiked a bit. Maybe this bow could help Clint hone his natural Priest instincts as well.

Loki allowed a cautious light of hope to flicker in his chest. Perhaps these Demonic spirits wouldn't tear the mortals asunder as he had originally predicted.

Clint let the glimmering bowstring go.

Like a magic bolt from his own hand, the arrow shot through the air towards the target. Fantasti—

THE NINES.

Sesshomaru, faster than Loki had seen him move in quite a while, in front of the path of the arrow.

No one had time to say anything, but Loki could see Clint's eyes widen and Stark's spine stiffen and straighten.

The purple arrow was grabbed out of the air by Sesshomaru and instantly a wash of blue youki flared out and all the markings on Sesshomaru's face and wrists turned jagged and long. His eyebrows furrowing slightly was the only sign of discomfort as the arrow and the youki dispelled into a lapis powdery dust.

"Are you crazy?! This is the magic that was basically created just to kill you! This isn't some sport or game!" Clint yelled from across the room. Loki could tell he was clearly agitated because obviously the last thing he wanted to do was to hurt Sesshomaru. They had grown rather curiously close as friends.
Stark had remained suspiciously silent except for a long eye-roll and a huff. He suspected that Stark was a hair more angry than he let on.

"...I haven't witnessed this display of purification magic before." Sesshomaru glanced down at the hand that caught the arrow. He opened and closed the fingers as if testing it.

"Curiosity didn't kill the cat, it killed the dog." Stark predictably threw his hands in the air and Loki chuckled. Only he knew that it would take a lot more purification magic than that to seriously harm his friend.

"I shall not die in your sparring room, Stark." Sesshomaru then looked a hair annoyed. Those two were positively the worst pair in the history of Demonic Mating rituals. Loki was sure of it.

"Yeah, actions speak louder than words, and trying to grab an arrow made to specifically kill you out of mid air doesn't reassure me." Stark retorted.

"Yeah, and don't put that on me. I'd rather not explain to Rin that I shot her dad and turned him into magic purple dust." Clint put the bow down and Sesshomaru tossed his hair.

"My test was sufficient. Your magic bolts are more than potent enough to purify the spirits, they, however are not strong enough to harm me. It'd be unwise to test your magic on Jaken." Sesshomaru stated, showing his palm which didn't so much have a mark. Loki scrunched his nose, Clint had just begun to discover Ichaival's potential as well as his own. He wondered if Clint continued to hone his ability if he actually could purify Sesshomaru.

Loki's thoughts flickered to the scepter and Clint's crystal blue eyes. That moment in the tunnel three years ago when he said he needed an eyeball.

No. He wouldn't allow that to happen to Clint once more. He COULDN'T.

"Jarvis you got that Magic signature right?" Stark asked his rather snarky AI. Loki tried his best to avoid it's detection, but it did always seem to catch him when he least wanted it's attention.

"Yes Sir, I am constructing an algorithm now from its data. It is remarkably similar to Loki Defender of Earth's magic signature, however the wavelength is even shorter, similar to that of a hard-xray." The AI informed the room and Stark's eyebrows furrowed.

"Might want to be careful how much you practice with your love-bow cupid. While that's not putting out enough radiation for me to paint the walls with lead pant, you're a walking Xray machine. So let's make sure you only practice that away from people who you know, may not want cancer or a bad sunburn. You can get a job at TSA now that you quit SHIELD." Stark flipped up another one of his boasting holo projectors and Sesshomaru just looked on with practiced boredom.

"What?! Loki you didn't tell me I could cause cancer!" Clint whipped around to Loki who shrugged. He wasn't aware that purification magic could do so either, in fact it didn't make much sense but magic often didn't.

"Mortals are fragile creatures, yet I doubt very much Ichaival would allow any undue harm to mortals. That wasn't its crafted purpose." Loki articulated. He didn't know if Stark's AI was accurate or not, and if it wasn't he would find a way to communicate to it to not interfere with Clint's mental state during his training. Spreading misinformation about his magic wasn't going to help them win this war.

"This bow, Loki, for what purpose was it crafted?" Sesshomaru approached and Loki smirked.
"Ichaival was crafted to hunt down those who pose a threat to Odin, specifically meaning your species and a few others including the Jotuns. I do say I am enjoying this little twist of fate." Loki flashed his teeth. And Sesshomaru narrowed his eyes. Ichaival was indeed forged to lay waste to those specific species, and he intended that Clint should never find out about his true heritage. Now that Loki thought about it, it was his Jotun heritage that most likely prevented him from utilizing the bow.

"Ok, yeah, no target practice until the real threat gets here, and don’t worry, I won't threaten little green with it.” Clint stared at the bow and his own hand, and Loki mused in his head what would happen if Clint ever used his purification magic on him. Would it hurt him as potently as Sho due to his Jotun form? Could Clint kill him?

Maybe that's how it should be when the time came.

Loki predicted the Aethon would make it's repairs soon, and then they would place the bait.

"Let's be off Clint, Stark has wasted enough of his time tinkering, let's go find dinner, I am feeling...steak." Loki wished to take Clint to that steakhouse before the whole city shut down to prepare for an intergalactic invasion.

It was by all accounts a gorgeous day that most insipid mortals here would enjoy by drinking their weak spirits and playing that game with the disc on the grass.

Well, it was a beautiful day indeed, aside from the Aethon, all black obsidian and teeming with an army hell-bent to slaughter all those who inhabited the planet.

Loki did itch to slaughter some of The Mad Titan's army and decimate the abomination of a spacecraft that used his own blood magic. His strategy was sound, and they were prepared as they could be…yet he sincerely doubted that Midgard, and the lost creatures led by their intrepid, but naïve captain were ready for the first wave of battle.

Loki had suffered far more than his fair share of loss.

Loki scrunched his nose. This wasn't going to be easy; they would suffer casualties. There would be funerals, and mourning and this would sober up their rag-tag group of misfit toys that this war would kill them. Perhaps all of them.

Except Clint.

He'd endeavor to protect him until the last drop of blood flowed through his capillaries.

"Earth to Loki? Are you focused?" Just the person he had been hoping to avoid speaking with. The captain. Loki glanced down the cordoned off street, flashing blue and red from garish sirens from their emergency vehicles.

Thanks to Sho's youki field surrounding Midgard, and his scry, they had ample time to evacuate most of the mortals that dwelled in this city and bring in their paltry military. The captain had managed to eke out some semblance of an order to the brigades of soldiers to heavily fortify the city, along with numerous armored units such as tanks and helicopters.

The illusion of strength was better than nothing. Loki’s lip twitched up, he knew all about illusions.
"You will find no one more focused than I, Captain." Loki flashed an irritated smile. He knew the captain was simply just trying to ease him into some sort of conversation, but Loki wasn't in the mood for chit-chat. He just wanted to maim something.

His armor would be positively glinting in the sunlight if the Aethon hadn't blanketed their city in shade.

The captain got closer to him and Loki regarded him with actual eye contact. What could he possibly want? Didn't he have some orders to bark to one of his dim mortal soldiers.

"It hasn't done anything yet, it's been stalled above DC for a half hour. What do you think is the reason for this?" Loki just KNEW he'd ask that question. Yes, the Aethon had been stalled above their city like a gavel unmoving, dark, and no sign of life waiting to fall and flatten them to the ground. The Captain had ordered not to fire the youki capsules Stark had engineered on the ship in case they wanted to speak to the leader of this province of Midgard.

Or the commander of the Aethon decided to do something brash, and defect.

Stark had been positively grating over it all, that and his constant fidgeting. His obnoxious, clipped done in his voice and his constant, jittery, unnecessary movement demonstrated a clear sign of anxiety over this situation, and how Sho was to handle the Nycteus.

Its sister ship, the Nycteus, was about to get ready in position over their most heavily fortified naval base, Norfolk.

He promised Clint he wouldn't teleport down to Norfolk to see if they needed his assistance, but he didn't intend on keeping that promise if sensed Sesshomaru's youki reach critical levels.

Sho's youki remained steady, and he was a Demon Lord. He could handle the Nycteus if he could channel the Astral Plane.

"The likely answer, is that they are aligning their assault schedules and that they instructed the Aethon to arrive first to incite us to panic." Loki had been unable to teleport past the ship's shields into the craft thus far. His own blood magic proved an effective barrier against him, but he had seen it coming. It left a dark cold pit in his gut that The Other knew his magic just as well as he did. At one point, he knew it better. Not any longer.

"It's a common tactic. One we won't fall to. I sense a victory here, Loki. We're ready, thanks to you." Their ever idealistic captain sounded serious but the note of optimism was too much for Loki.

"Are you? Are you ready for the volume of death that is sure to drown you and the morale of your military? The Other picked apart my brain and put it back together. I assure you, Captain, they have something planned to counter my strategy. Steel yourself to lose a friend or twenty." Loki's green eyes cut sharply and Rogers straightened into rigid stone. This was going to be nothing like his farcical invasion three years ago, or the warning shot from the Aethon mere days ago.

A dark anger began to buzz in Loki's chest. He summoned his daggers. Enough was enough, he could bring the fight to them. He could just leave an illusion to fool Thor and teleport up and use Yggdrasil's magic to blast a hole through the hull. His own magic in their shields, as well as Thor's overprotectiveness, be DAMNED.

"I'm ready to die for my friends and country, Loki. Are you?" Rogers turned and Loki scoffed.
"Do you think what I'm ready for really matters, Captain? Death reaches and death takes, it doesn't care if you're ready." As if on cue, the Aethon lit up. Ultraviolet lines glowed across the entirety of the ship and the main door underneath the Aethon slowly opened.

He heard a whisper of something on the wind. Faint, but he recognized it.

His heart twisted and stopped. No.

He had heard that war trumpet before many, many times, and each time brought a defeat.

Loki’s mouth dried out as the blood rushed from his head to his heels.

That noise itself was death reaching its taloned hand out and clenching his throat shut like a vice.

"Stark better have completed that containment field from Clint's purification magic…. We are about to need it." Loki murmured. Loki had been floored that Stark had wanted to try to use Clint's purification magic to create a containment field.

'I know you can't believe
I could just leave it wrong
And you can't make it right
I'm gon' take off tonight into the night'

The track of 'Heartless' a ballad off of Kanye West's, Album '808s and Heartbreaks' sang muted out of the speakers of Clint's small speakers as they lay tangled on Clint's bed.

Clint had explained to him that 808s meant a certain bass drum frequently used in hip hop music. Loki didn't really understand all of what that meant, but it seemed to fit since his heart pounded in the base of his ears like a wardrum.

The glowing digital clock read 3:49 am. The Aethon and Nycteus had powered up their engines according to Sho's most recent scry and Stark's D.E.M.O.N.S. device supported this. Loki supposed he was as ready as he'd ever be.

"Loki, you know you can tell me anything, right? What's up?" Loki had his head on Clint's chest and while it wasn't the most natural position for them laying down, Loki sort of…needed it. He longed for Clint's calloused fingers to meander through his dark, wavy hair.

"Don't worry about me, Clint." Loki stated absently.

"Don't give me that shit. An invasion is on our doorstep, even Nat is antsy. You needing something from me isn’t... asking too much." Clint gripped his hair a hair too tight and Loki pursed his lips. He always ran a fine line between what he wanted to say and what was needed.

Loki had a feeling of dread he couldn't place. That something was going to go horribly sideways when the Aethon arrived in the capital of this province in eleven hours time.

They were lucky to get this time together; he wasn't going to ruin it with unsubstantiated nonsense. But Thor's restlessness, and Sho's rigidity all showed what the mortals couldn't sense.

That this battle was going to set the tone for the whole war, and it wasn't a good tone.

Loki sat up and propped himself up to take a good long look at the mortal he had come to love.
Yes.

Love.

Not.

Covet.

What in the Nine realms had he let himself fall into this time?

Not that Clint would ever know it. This was his selfish, lead lined, velvet trimmed burden to bear.

'I'm a monster, I'm a maven
I know this world is changing
Never gave in, never gave up
I'm the only thing I'm afraid of'

The song had changed to ‘Amazing’, one of Loki's personal favorites.

"Clint, the Aethon and the Nycteus will arrive, they will annihilate more than you and your allies have possibly calculated. They will kill many, many mortals. You will all grieve their losses, but in no solar system will I allow the Aethon to take the capital city of this province. Sho will assure a similar outcome for that military base. Victory will be ours, and we will witness it, together." Loki grinned and he hoped he sounded as sure as he wanted to sound. Because he wasn't this was a smooth, icy lie he had practiced. Well, half-lie. He couldn't insure that the capital city of their province wouldn't fall to the Mad Titan, but he could definitely defeat the Aethon and insure a draw. A tie of sorts. As long as that mortal, Obama Barak? Fled and his most close advisors lived, then it was enough of a victory for Loki.

Well, that and if Sho didn't get captured by the Other. Loki was most certain his closed off best friend was keeping something from him about the scepter that he hadn't told him.

"... why am I not buying this? What am I missing?" Clint's warm gaze locked into his, and Loki grinned and sighed.

"I do believe, my dear Clint, you may be overthinking our current predicament." Loki placed slow, deliberate kisses on his chest.

"And I do believe, my dear pain the ass, that you're hiding something from me." Clint straightened up and Loki barely hid a huff. He just had to fall for an observant mortal.

He always hid from people, especially those he was closest to.

"Clint, I'm not hiding anything from you. My strategy will hold and..." Loki struggled with this. How did he phrase his itching anger and unease? "The Aethon and the Nycteus will fall." Loki smiled earnestly, except it wasn't earnest. Yet, he was the God of lies, that was to expected, right?

"Ugh I don't buy what you just said at all. You can't fool me. Just look how Thor keeps looking at the war table and he isn't touching any food, not even the pop-tarts or ice cream Rin gives him. All Fancy Pants does is stand on Tony's roof, train, and glare up at the sky. I don't think he's slept in days, won't come inside, and Tony's at absolute wits-end—" Loki pressed a finger to Clint's lips. He was going to be difficult about this wasn't he?

'I'm not loving you, the way I wanted to
See I had to go, see I had to move
No more wasting time, you can't wait for life
We're just racing time, where's the finish line?

'Love Lockdown.' Loki didn't like this song too much. Something about it hit too close to home. Like if Clint really listened to the lyrics, he would figure him out.

"Clint. This is the Mad Titan and his armada. You and the other mortals, no offense to you all, may not understand that this warlord has been destroying planets for longer than Thor has lived. He is cunning, relentless, and has already bested Sho once in a duel. That, I assure you, tells of his prowess. While Thor and Sho have squared off in friendly melee, neither of us have fought Sho one on one seriously and we don't relish the prospect. What Sho said about him being trained to be a duelist was true, along with Thor being trained to be a general, and I a strategist. As long as we stick to our advantages, we will persevere. Thor's unease lies with being a leader and dealing with loss, and Sho's vigilance is due to his new gifts and technology is faced with, I will ensure they shan't be overwhelmed. The threat we face is real, but we will hold them back." Loki vowed.

"Remember I am your shadow of vengeance and I will live past this battle to slay the Other." Loki licked his lips.

Clint immediately scooted back on the bed, hinged up, placed his hands on the sides Loki's face and kissed him slow. Loki worked his lips against Clint's like this would be the last time they'd touch skin.

"OK, OK, I get it. You and the immortal force are nervous, but got it handled." Clint's eyebrows waggled and Loki chuckled a bit.

Street Lights by Kanye started to play. Loki could relate to this song. He had so much more he wanted to accomplish.

'Seems like street lights, glowing, happen to be
Just like moments, passing, in front of me
So I hopped in the cab and I paid my fare
See I know my destination, but I'm just not there.'

"We are far from immortal. You could perhaps slay me easily with Ichaival." Loki sat up on the bed and put his hands up in the universal sign of surrender.

"I shot you once before, I don't need to do it again." Clint flashed a little grin that was all façade. Loki hummed.

"I deserved every arrow. But Clint, if for whatever reason the scepter gains control of my mind, and Sho is not arou—"

"Don't. Don't ask that of me, because it won't happen." Clint sprung up and tackled Loki to the bed, his arms on either side of Loki's head, chests pressed together together as if to cement themselves as one. "You're stronger than...anyone I've known. We have the scepter under control and I believe you can bring it under control too. Trust yourself, Loki. Trust yourself as much as I trust you." Loki on instinct, almost laughed, but the genuine honesty, the drive that Clint put into his words...made him want to believe.

Maybe...maybe he could best the Other's magic over his mind. Maybe if he killed the Other it didn't mean the Other's magic holding his own mind together would unravel and he would lose himself too. Or maybe he should just have Sho kill him. Sho would and could stomach it. They had long, long ago as adolescents made a pact to slay each other if the time called for it.
Loki opened his mouth to say something but Clint just shut it again with another warm kiss Loki knew he didn't really deserve. All this kindness. Warmth. He couldn't possibly begin to repay it.

"Loki, you're stronger than you give yourself credit for. Stop fishing for compliments, I've always been a better hunter than a fisherman." Clint chuckled and Loki couldn't help it, he did too.

'I got my life and it's my only one
I got the night, I'm running from the sun
So good night, I'm headed out the door, door, door, door, door
After tonight there will be no return'

Loki hadn't listened to 'See You in my Nightmares' before, but he rather liked it. It paralleled what he went through.

"Fancy Pants told me some things you like. Check this out." Clint flipped around on the bed, and Loki had absolutely no idea what Clint was talking about. Sesshomaru would by no means tell Clint what he liked. Sesshomaru didn't needlessly divulge information.

From underneath the bed, Clint produced a T shirt. That reminded him he would have to glamour some more ridiculous clothes on Sho for this.

Printed on the orange and white T shirt was an OWL. AN OWL! Loki's skin crawled and he wrinkled his nose. How any being could bare to entertain the thought of those pests being anything other than abhorrent was a complete mystery. Owls could twist their necks all the way around! They sounds they made ghost stories real, and their EYES! Anything with eyes that big and a mouth that small were not to be trusted. Also birds carried all sorts of disease, plagues, and shat from the SKY.

He and Sho never understood the allure of feathers, they seemed absolutely impossible to keep clean.

The word 'Hooters' (no doubt some sort of homage to their screeching terrible noise) was also emblazoned in an absolutely heinous shade of orange.

Along on the shirt was a name-tag.

It read 'Kiki'.

Ok. He was wrong. He didn't love this man. He wanted to murder him. And Sho.

Sho had told him about Suzuka.

'It's so crazy, crazy-crazy
I got everything figured out
But for some reason I can never find what real love is about
No doubt.'

Pinocchio Man, Loki had heard this fable from a cartoon once upon a time when he visited Midgard on an anniversary trip. He visited Midgard once every fifty years on the date that he last saw Sho. It was about a puppet whose nose grew whenever he told a lie. It hit a little too close to home, well except for the nose growing thing.

Being someone's puppet, lying to make everything go smoothly or to please Odin. Being swallowed by a giant maw and being left for dead. Wishing to be real.
Was the God of Lies…this Pinocchio truly? Nines he was thinking too much, he'd surely become Sho at the rate.

"I am going to pretend that you never showed me that atrocity. I am going to make myself believe that you do not tolerate those vile feather covered plagues. I am also going to tell myself that Sho did not tell you about Suzuka, or I really will challenge him to a duel, and win handsomely." Loki's green magic coiled at his fingers. He knew whatever Sho meant was in jest…but OWLS and Kiki?

He would have to keep an eye on their friendship, and never allow them to accompany each other unattended in a jet ever again.

Speaking of that, he would have to really lay into Sho how he never told him he could fly. He doubted very much that he learned that skill after he departed for Alfheim. Sho did indeed keep some things quite secret. Not that he didn't but Sho wasn't him and Loki almost felt betrayed.

"Aw, you can dish out the nicknames and jokes, but can't take them back?" Clint chided and held up the shirt on Loki as if to check to see if was the correct size.

"Kiki was a name bestowed upon me by someone with who I had a complicated relationship. She was a Phoenix Demoness of immense prowess and would best me often in duels. We were not… enemies per-se, but we certainly were NOT close friends. The name I gave Sesshomaru is in a completely different context than the one she would taunt me with." Loki sneered. He was right.

The album by now had looped back around to first track: 'Say You Will'.

'When I grab your neck, I touch your soul
Take off your cool then lose control.'

"Yeah, Fancy Pants told me she had the advantage on you, that you're weak against Demonic Fire. Though, turn around is fair play, Kiki. Plus she doesn't sound that bad. From what I've heard you were a pretty aggravating teenager. You probably deserved whatever she dished out." Clint sassed and Loki sputtered.

Ok. Perhaps that may have been true in some regard, but she had quite literally tried to KILL him. Three times! They of course teamed up on occasion, mostly due to Sesshomaru's decision, and usually their spats devolved into something more heated….

Ok he was not discussing his ex-lovers…whatever Suzuka was with his current one. He also didn't truly wish to talk ill of the dead, especially with their spirits now flitting about.

"Oh and I am sure you were a treat to be around at that age as well." Loki flashed a grin and decided he'd let him keep that shirt. Maybe it would come in handy later.

"Hey, at least my fights didn't cause inter-planetary incidents, which I'm sure yours did with Fancy Pants and Thor." Clint attempted to throw the shirt onto a hanger hook but missed and the shirt fell to the floor. Loki magicked it up to the hook for him. "Nice assist, we should play two on two basketball." Clint pointed and Loki immediately wrinkled his nose. Surely Clint had to have known that Loki loathed sporting games. Sho also despised them, aside from the occasional race.

Was that something he needed to participate in? his love of Midgardian sports? He hoped not…but…well…

They did offer some good wagers.

"We cleaned up almost as many messes as we started." Flagrant lie. "Thor loves to speak about the
time we defeated a vicious army of Scorpion Demons that had begun to lay waste to a certain region of Asgard.” Loki informed, remembering that battle of attrition quite well.

Heimdall, Odin, Frigga, and himself had never quite figured out how the Scorpion Demons managed to infiltrate Asgard, but they did and ravaged countless villages before he, Thor and Sesshomaru defeated them. To this day, Loki suspected someone close to Sesshomaru had been responsible, though Sho vehemently denied any involvement. Loki ardently believed his innocence, as did Thor. After recently hearing of Sesshomaru's mother's mastery of the Astral Plane, he surmised it was probably her attempt at revenge on Odin for nearly killing Sesshomaru when he transformed into his grand canine form in the middle of Odin's assembly hall.

Sesshomaru was not happy to hear Odin's excuses about missing Son of Taisho's funeral.

That was NOT a fun day.

"Well, then, we got nothing to worry about when the Aethon gets here." Clint fussed with the hem of his shirt which just made Loki magic it off.

"Let's...enjoy the time we have left, Clint. I grow bored of hearing you talk about such dull topics.” Loki unleashed a devilish grin. He wanted to push the invasion off to the farthest corners of his mind and focus on the crooked smile as warm as Vanalheim sunshine in front of him.

The last track started to play, 'Welcome to Heartbreak', when Loki trailed wet love bites down Clint's chest.

'And my head keeps spinning
Can't stop having these visions, I gotta get with it
And my head keeps spinning
I can't stop having these visions, I gotta get with it.'

"Tony, it's go time for Operation Ghostbusters." The ever intrepid captain announced and Loki summoned his daggers. This was NOT a fight he was looking forward to having. He never thought he would have to encounter this particular Demoness again.

Yet, didn't he just say The Mad Titan would find the one flawless counter to his strategy?

As soon as the trumpet blare ended, a globe of purple light directly under the Aethon expanded as a glowing dome to encompass not only the Aethon, but at least a mile out in either direction. Stark's containment field bubbled to life making their battle appear as if inside a purple sparing arena. Or one of those snow-sphere toys that if one shook it, white bits of snow would swirl and fall.

As if snow was really beautiful. Snow only meant silence and death.

A glint of gold, orange, and crimson flared from the bow of the Aethon. Stark's invention had worked, he could see her! It perplexed Loki for when Sesshomaru explained the situation of the Demonic Souls, he would have sworn that she would have been sealed in Jotunheim. Loki had a very hard time imagining her expiring before the war with the Mad Titan, she was an incredible fighter.

Loki watched as she descended through the sky on golden wings of flame. Two long, feathered antennae looped above her head, creating a glowing saffron circle above her long crimson feathered hair. Adorned in flowing white robes and polished armor, she looked every bit an entity that most in Midgard would regard as an Angel.
However, that was only because their memories of the legendary Phoenix Demons were lost long ago. She was about as angelic as he himself was.

In her right hand she wielded a long trumpet that reached about well over a meter long.

"We're…we're fighting Angels?! We can't fight Angels!" Loki heard one of the soldiers shout from across the battalion near him.

"If she's our enemy, she's no Angel, soldier hold your position." The Captain commanded and Loki remembered something about him ascribing to one of the mortal religions that revered these Angels as holy and good. He ardently believed some asinine drivel about a mortal who could create grape wine from water, and build a boat to hold of two of every animal and other sorts of nonsense.

"Couldn't have said it better myself, Captain. Don't engage her, you'll just lose your life. She is their counter to my strategy" Loki stepped forward as she landed in front of him, wings tucked and folded behind her. Even at her full height she barely reached his shoulder.

"It has been a long long while Kiki. Did you miss me?" Her beautiful smile broke into a wild smirk. Her sharp rose eyes stared him down as her long talons drummed lightly on her gleaming trumpet. Loki sighed through his nose and palmed his face.

THE NINES.

Of all the Demonesses…of all the Spirits who could plague him. it'd be HER.

Suzuka.

The stunning Phoenix Demoness with whom on many occasion 'fought' in more ways than one. She was a force unparalleled, and no, Loki didn't loathe her. He couldn't. He, however, didn't hold any affection or lust for her any longer. He respected her speed, her mind, and her tenacity. However, he had no idea what she was thinking now.

"Loki…who is that?" Rogers called out, shield ready.

"…I believe the term you mortals would say, an ex-girlfriend of mine." Loki's mouth hardened into a grim line as feminine laughter percolated through the air. She even fooled most by sounding like an Angel. He had believed it once before as well. She looked every bit the part of celestial, along with Suzaku who Sesshmaru mercilessly slew centuries ago.

Five-hundred years in the Demonic Underwold only to be forced out by half the Soul Gem. Loki was willing to bet

"Hello Suzuka, Lady of the Southern Fire Islands." Loki had to play this just right or she'd incinerate each and every mortal in a three kilometer radius with a singular blast from her trumpet. "It certainly has been a while, and the company you're currently keeping is certainly not up to your usual standards." Loki poked a bit, hands white knuckling his daggers.

Every time he faced her, he had lost. Miserably.

She probably would have slain him back when he was much younger if Sho hadn't intervened. He claimed he did it only to repay him from the Uru dragon, but he knew that Sho wouldn't have let someone kill someone in his 'pack' in his territory without his expressed permission.

"So formal dear Kiki, you can call me Suzu like you used to! Oh and the company, allow me to explain, some arrogant Fire Demon, Mephisto, and some other masked creep struck a deal with
me. I get a second chance at life and my choice of body of those Demons left in the Frozen Lands, and all I have to do for him is to fight and kill you. Easy pickings." Suzuka smirked pressing the trumpet to her lips. Loki's magic immediately began to coil green and hot around his hands, readying to teleport and fight her to the death.

She was being used as a distraction so he couldn't concentrate on bringing down the Aethon himself.

She did give him valuable information however, Mephisto had to be in league with the Other, Loki was sure of it. If the Other and Mephisto were working together to thwart his strategy, he doubted the Fire Demon was the one behind the mutany against Thanos. That left whoever was the captain of the other battle ship, the Voracious.

"Maybe I am mistaken, but as a Phoenix Demoness, I thought you had the ability to achieve a second life all on your own? Suzu, you've lost your touch, literally and figuratively." Loki taunted, keeping her attention. He replicated himself five times, in a pentagram all around her.

"Kiki, You don't even know what befell me, do you?" Suzuka frowned, almost, almost sorrowfully. "I'll have to pick your brain a bit to see what you really remember, my lovely magic man." She flashed her fangs at him and laughed. He had to throw up a shield against the Aethon just like he had in Shanghai. It may not last long, but if he could funnel and redirect the Chitauri into a few choke points, it would help Stark and his other friend 'Rhodey' pick them off easier.

He reached his hand up and the flowering, green oleander flower blossomed out much easier and with less resistance than it had days before. Maybe he had gotten the hang of summoning Yggdrasil's magic after all. The Chitauri now snaked out sluggishly from small gaps in the pedals and he caught Stark's friend hit a few of the escaping Chitauri with his own weaponized suit of armor.

"Brother! Now is not the time for your tricks and games involving one of your former lovers! Begone vile Siren!" Thor's voice bellowed out from down the street. Loki's eyes flashed wide. THAT MORON.

"Heeeeeeaaahhhhh!" A brilliant thunderbolt arced from Mjolnir at Suzaka who merely glanced passively its direction. In the same instance the lightning hit, she vanished.

"YOU DOLT. She is as fast or faster than Sesshomaru, direct, long range attacks won't work!" Loki shouted but it was far too late. Suzaka had basically materialized next to Thor, looking up to him, flaming wings out.

"I can see why Loki never liked you. You're dumb, slow, and incapable." Her radiant wings flared out. "Using lightning against a spirit, don't you think? I didn't even need to dodge your attack! It wouldn't have grazed me! Now, let me show you how to really start a fight. Radiant Blaze of the South!" Her wings raged like an inferno and fanned out towards Thor and a whole battalion. Thor braced himself but was flung far back as a flaming, burning heap. Mortals in his brigade shouted out in terror, trying in vain to put out the fires. Great pillars of unceasing fire had caused a few of the tanks and armored vehicles around the mortals to combust and buildings' windows blew out from the heat.

The cries, shattering glass, and shout of Thor made Loki roll his eyes. Suzuka certainly remembered how to make her signature entrance.

Loki pursed his lips. He didn't start this mess, he didn't ask for this trouble, but he wasn't going sit
by and watch Suzuka kill Thor and countless, harmless mortals. Loki threw out his hand and willed the borrowed branch of Yggdrasil's magic into it, just like he had back in that city where he healed their intrepid captain and Romanoff.

"Your fight is with me, Suzu! Or did your memory vanish with your physical body as well!?" Loki grinned as the green magic unfurled from his hands as verdant ivy vines and snaked across the street, spreading green powdery magic to snuff out the red youki flames. The green and red intertwined and smoked out into a brown, listless dust.

He may have lost to her before, but he was stronger now. His magic very well may not be enough to defeat her, but it sure was enough to get her attention.

She turned to him, the brilliant, raging inferno from her wings dying down to their regular golden hue. Her feathered antenna continued to circle her head. He once thought her so intriguing, but now she just grated on his nerves. She wasn't supposed to be here. And in a twisted way he almost felt betrayed even though he had no real right to feel that way.

How dare she take up arms against him, and team up with the Mad Titan? Didn't she know…no. She probably had not the faintest idea who The Mad Titan was if she fell before he arrived at Midgard.

She was just a pawn. A puppet. 

"My memory is crystal clear. You disappeared from Earth for fifty years. I grew bored and searched out for you. I even heralded with my trumpet the Aesir which I had every right to as the Lady of the Southern Fire Islands. You know what I got for my troubles? A squadron of Valkyries. Oh, of course, at first I thought they had come to assist in your search, but no. They arrived to silence and vanquish me and scatter my ashes into the Great Sea." Her cold eyes cut to where a smoking Thor had begun to stagger up to a standing position, brushing embers from his charred cape.

So Odin had sunk to assassination of a Demoness, one he knew to be an ally, to ensure they wouldn't be found on Alfeim.

"Allfather would never order the Valkyries to slay a Demon Lady, especially one you courted!" Thor looked shaken up, as if he also forgot how perilous Demons could be when they fought like the meant it. Yet, Loki couldn't spare any concern Thor's way. He'd been through far worse and it was as if the fire youki affected Thor's body like it did his own. Jotuns were rather sensitive to fire youki.

Loki didn't say anything, his fury was building within him, but all he wanted to do was shake Thor with it.

"...right brother?!" Thor insisted.

"Odin stood silent as the Demons were wiped off the face of the planet. He allowed their genocide, Thor, and for the last time I am not your brother." Loki sighed, black magic surging within him. He probably couldn't hit Suzu with it, but there was only way to find out.

Suzu's scarlet brows furrowed.

"You should have known better to seek me out if I didn't want to be found, Suzu. If you want my undivided attention, you have it now." Loki gritted his teeth, gripped his daggers, and teleported in front of Thor to come between Suzuka and the blundering God of Thunder.
"So, you defend that warlord you call a father?" She seethed back.

"Never! He was never my father, but you should have been smarter to think he'd ever help you." He bit back. "He certainly never helped me, nor any other Demon." Loki and his illusions chorused. He found his rage. He, along with his illusions, summoned dozens of sparkling black gumtree bombs to surround Suzu and in union collide on her location. He glared back at Thor, hearing him spin Mjolnir.

"Thor stand down! This is my fight and don't you dare let anyone else interfere. Focus on the Aethon's cannons when Stark brings down their shields with Sho's youki capsules," Loki ordered with a grave tone he knew would ensure Thor wouldn't meddle in his affairs.

"Brother, she is formidable. Mjonlir is red from the heat of her flames, I have never seen Mjolnir react this way against fire ever. She could kill you." Thor warned and Loki sighed long and hard through his nose.

"Uru reflects Youki and absorbs magic, Thor. It seems that her attack almost overwhelmed Mjolnir's threshold to reflect youki. You'd do best remembering this if you face another Demon Spirit, or Mephisto himself." Loki ignored the obvious, of course she could kill him. Had Thor suddenly gotten more dense in the past few days?

"But brother, can you even hurt her?!" Thor asked and Loki rolled his eyes. He needed to mind his own business.

The dust and smoke settled and Suzuka shrugged her slim shoulders.

His black magic, which could scorch and severely damage Sesshomaru didn't faze her in the least. The purification dome simply rendered her visible, she was THAT powerful.

"You were always ungrateful, I won't regret killing you here." Suzuka twirled her trumpet and blew, unleashing more pillars of fire that Loki managed to rebuff back with a vibrant, green wall of flowers.

"Focus on yourself, Thor, and relay this to your captain, Mephisto the Fire Demon is in direct league with the Other, he is not the head of the mutiny that Hakudoshi spoke of." Loki's eyes widened. Hakudoshi. He was unaccounted for.

He must be on the Nycteus. Good, Sesshomaru could more than handle him.

"I will and brother, I believe in you. We will both stand victorious." He ignored Thor's empty encouragement, and teleported to Suzuka and lashed out in a horizontal strike.

Suzuka blocked the blow with her trumpet and smirked.

They continued like this, flits of strikes of silvery daggers sparking against the gold trumpet. He kept a portion of his mind and magic locked into upholding the shield against the Aethon's smaller cannons and Chitauri. It was far easier this time around, but he needed to think of a way to harm her. He couldn't simply keep dodging and deflecting her attacks.

He'd eventually tire out and lo—

He missed a parry and took a harsh crack to the right temple, sending him bouncing and sprawling across the pavement. His ears rang and blood flowed from his mouth. Broken jaw. He mended it with a bit of green magic and rubbed it.
"You're still a touch too slow, Kiki." Suzuka flit back and put the Trumpet to her lips. "Sonata of the South!" Suzuka sang and just like how her voice sounded like the sun, the inferno that raged from the horn scorched like it.

Loki threw up a green magic force field that he prayed would hold. He strained as he pushed every strand, every branch of magic he could muster into the wall. The heat from the flames dampened his hair and burnt the asphalt on the ground he stood on.

"Curse your damned fire!" Sweat already had begun to snake down Loki's brow and into his eyes. How could she be this strong as a mere spirit? Did it have something to do with her being a Phoenix? No, this was her fighting spirit.

She was betrayed too by Odin, by Mephisto and the Other, and he had let her down as well. He pitied her. Yet another soul that lost their life to Odin's callous greed, but he didn't have the time to get her favor onto their side.

The crimson and gold tongues of flame burned through his wall and THE NINES was it impossibly hot. Loki could feel his magic wane, he couldn't grasp the branch of Yggdrasil. Pain chewed up his arms in the form of blossoming burns. His shield wouldn't last much longer.

Anger swelled in his chest as Loki sneered and refocused through the pain. He couldn't let her win! Not this time, not when it really mattered! He had so much left to destroy! He hadn't slaughtered enough of the Mad Titan's army yet. He hadn't done ANYTHING worthwhile yet!

He had the spirit in him to fight too!

His once polished armor now had blackened and warped from the heat. His hands began to blister and bleed from the burns. He couldn't hear anything except his own pulse in his ears and the roar of her Phoenix fire. The pain spiked and his daggers glowed scarlet and orange from the heat. The uru was doing its best to refract her fire, but they were getting too hot to hold. His arms trembled and his arms now blistered and puckered.

He was NOT going to fall here at his first opponent. He had to slay the Other! He had to protect Clint, he had to tell Sho about the cosmic gems and the gauntlet. He had to find some shred of magic to use against her. He concentrated, but his left dagger, hot and slick, slipped from his grip and he closed his eyes in anticipation of the wave of fire. He didn't even hear the dagger clatter on the ground.

"Your magic has always been fickle, Kiki!" The shield slipped and a torrent of fire hit him square on. Loki braced himself as best he could, but the fire surged so much hotter and vicious than he remembered. As much as the Demons did not deserve to be obliterated out of the tombs of history and frozen on Jotunheim, he certainly did NOT miss fighting them.

The fire hit him head on right before he managed to teleport away.

He coalesced as much emerald magic as he could in his right dagger and launched at Suzuka. That should show her to boast!

His dagger sailed through her, just like what happened to Hakudoshi. No. Stark's containment field may be strong enough for his magic to block hers, but not enough to directly harm an incredibly spirit like her even with a physical attack.

No magic. No weapons. She was invincible. Loki fought the acid of panic flooding his veins.

He knew he should have had Thor steal him more Blitzen poison from the Scepter room. That
incredibly overly paranoid Stark had put the remainder of his poison in the youki room that held
the scepter just to spite him. He knew it.

Now he had to think fast.

"Now feel the death I felt! Feel the life drain from you and know that nothing can save you!
Sesshomaru and that sword of his are far from here, and I can smell none of that poison you used
on Hakudoshi! Crumple and fall Loki of Asgard!" she turned to him, so so angry. "Radiant Blaze of
the South!" He braced his arms around him, trying in vain to coil his magic around himself.

The torrent of fire clawed and peeled his skin through his lightweight armor. His ears rang despite
him tucking his head behind his arms, he had to gather his magic and teleport out of this situation,
but the intense youki merely vaporized his teleportation magic once it started to ring around him.
Agony lanced through his body disoriented his magic. He had to gather it all up, concentrate, and
unleash it quickly.

The thin magic protection powdered around him fast and he heard himself scream, the tips of his
sweaty hair ignited into candles. His magic flickered and failed. Why? Why was Yggdrasil failing
him now? He had done so much better against Sho. Why was he fading here?

Why did he always fail when it mattered most?! He opened his eyes and willed his magic to the
surface, but the fire blistered hot and his charred skin cracked open.

Loki screamed all the air from his lungs past his cracked lips.

Out of the corner of his eye a streak of stellar violet speared through the sky and suddenly the fire
ceased.

Clint! NO!

Scorn darkened Suzuka's fair face. She had somehow managed to deflect the Purification Bolt.
Loki's throat closed thick and wet because he knew that she wouldn't allow such an offense to slide.
Loki cursed himself. He cursed his weakness. He cursed that no matter what, he still couldn't
amount to anything close to what Thor was meant to be. Resentment and anger coiled and twitched
in his blood.

He hated how much he hated himself, but he had to overcome this. He had a mission and that was
to prevent Suzuka from roasting Clint to cinder. He spotted Clint high on a building, maybe he
thought he could have the advantage of height, but he'd be mistaken. She could cross that distance
in no time.

"A Priest dare turn his arrow at me?!” Suzuka had that certain look in her eye that she wanted to
eviscerate everything in her path. Her halo of feathers brightened and began to pulse in light,
readying her ultimate attack. Loki knew he had one shot at getting Clint out of harm's way. Loki
then realized that the Chitauri had poured out the Aethon in droves. His shield had lost a few magic
pedals and now only blocked around two thirds of the bottom of the Aethon.

Even a few of their galactic Cetaceans had emerged and destroyed what looked like a tall white
obelisk.

He had to defeat Suzuka and assist the others in fending off the Chitauri or they'd surely level the
whole city.

He had to end this senseless duel fast.
"—Loki!" Clint called and he had no idea how he could hear him from that distance but he knew his voice anywhere. Clint sounded panicked and the Chitauri began to swarm his position. Loki seethed, he allowed Suzuka to distract him from protecting Clint. His eyes turned a wicked black.

Dark magic coiled around Loki's right hand and a vine of dark magic shot out and grappled Suzuka's gleaming trumpet. They both struggled to control the direction and movement of the trumpet. They must have looked ridiculous, like two children playing tug of war with a musical instrument, but he could not allow Suzuka to use her strongest attack.

Loki stole a glance back, catching Thor's lightning arcing across the sky, electrocuting a swath of chitauri and a Cetacean. Pops of gunfire sounded all around him, but it all sounded a bit muffled through the anger fogging his head.

"You will leave him be! He is my lover and you will NOT kill him over our bloodfeud!" Loki's chest radiated rage. He was DONE with the PAST. He had to focus on the present. He summoned his left dagger back to him and lunged at Suzuka using all his speed. Suzuka set her stance and her wings flared to life.

Another purple flash came out of the corner of his eye and Suzuka effortlessly dodged the bolt just as she had the lightning from Mjolnir. If only he could use the Purification magic himself!

Just then, he had an idea. His uru daggers, they refracted youki, but absorbed magic…

"Oh, are you attached to the Priest, Loki? Did you take up a mortal lover in this time? You were away when my people were massacred by the Aesir and now you love a mortal?!!" Suzuka shrieked.

So, Mephisto and the Other told her that the Aesir killed the Demons. It made sense, in a way they were partially responsible.

"Open your eyes, Suzu! The Mad Titan and the Other killed all the Demons centuries ago, why else would Sesshomaru take up arms against them?!!" Loki pleaded, but logic was most likely lost at this point. Suzuka would never allow herself to be hit by a purification arrow; she could easily dodge them now they weren't a surprise. but…if his uru daggers could absorb Clint's purification magic….

"He betrayed us! Mephisto said he betrayed his own mother for Sounga! He is in league with you and that Storm God!" Suzuka raged, fire balls flashing out from her wings in all directions, hitting more armored vehicles, soldiers, and Chitauri alike. She couldn't be reasoned with, and he almost didn't blame her.

He could win. He WOULD win.

"You're a relic, a hold over, a chain to a past life that I will sever, Suzuka. You don't belong here." He circled around, wincing as his blistered skin cracked open and bled from the exertion. He had to slice through the Purification bolt just right….

Suzuka reared back, finally winning back her trumpet. Her eyes flashed in fury and her feathered halo spun round her head, shining like a beacon. She extended her trumpet high in the sky, the edge of the trumpet ignited in fire like a torch.

"I belong wherever I deem belonging! You don't get to determine my fate! I will slay you here! Herald of Fortune!!" Suzuka shrieked and a circle of fire ringed her trumpet. He had seen her ultimate attack only once before and it wasn't used against him. Believe it or not, he and Suzuka
had actually teamed up and were on the same side for a few battles.

He spotted another violet bolt. Loki had little clue how Clint knew to keep firing at her, perhaps it was just instinct. Or maybe there was some deeper bond between them. Maybe what they had….no he couldn't entertain that idea. He cursed himself again. Clint should be focusing on the Chitauri and assisting the other mortals in their own battles, not his duel.

"Death doesn't scare me!" Loki's mouth dried out, the timing on the bolt and her attack was too close. He'd probably have to endure at least the initial part of her lethal attack. Loki got on the balls of his feet, pushing the radiating pain of his burnt skin to the farthest part of his mind. He had gotten quite good at pushing the pain away when he really dug deep.

He wasn't lying. He wasn't afraid of death, but he didn't wish to die here, not right now at least.

The ring of fire around her head expanded and swooped down in front of her as she thrusted her trumpet through the hollow space in the middle. Loki could sense the magic of the Purification bolt swiftly coming from behind him. He could time this right.

The whirling, circular blade of fire finally reached the apex of speed and power as it lashed out. Loki threw out a magic shield he knew wouldn't hold for long, but it would buffer him against the initial volley of fiery, slicing wheels.

Maybe.

"I will not go back to that underworld! I will find another body and live anew!" Suzuka shouted, her beautiful face gaunt in rage. Loki could hear the shriek of the Purification bolt as his shield buckled and powdered into brown dust. Loki twisted back, lifted his left arm over his head and threw his dagger at the bolt. He threw up a grand, verdant cyprus tree of green magic with his right hand, a vain attempt to buffer the flames while he waited for the bolt and the dagger to collide.

His ornate, uru dagger struck and absorbed the violet magic in a radiant burst. He quickly called the dagger back as the flames incinerated the magic Cypress tree, his last line of defense. He couldn't risk throwing the dagger at her lest she dodge it just as he had the bolts. He had to stab her directly.

"Beings like us, Suzuka, don't get a second chance at life!" Loki yelled hoarsely back, embers burning his mouth and lungs. An immense, rushing wall of fire smacked him head-on as he grasped the glowing purple dagger and launched himself through the flames. He'd make it through this. At least long enough to stab her through the heart and purify her back to the Demonic Underworld where she belonged.

His clothes and armor on his back ashed away as he ducked low and lunged to the most direct route to her heart, fire be damned! He could feel his hair wisped around him, burning and how his scalp stung! Pillars of flame around him condensed from around him in an attempt to render him to embers before he could strike.

Yet, he was the ultimate weapon. Weapons and shadows didn't allow pain to take root.

He was the shadow of vengeance to Clint's light of hope and he would stay true to that promise. He would keep this vow even if this fire ultimately obliterated his darkness. The inferno still roared and he knew that he must look like a charred piece of meat from one of Asgard's feasts. He wondered absently what joke Thor and the Warriors Three would make at his expense if this was any other battle. The rank stench of his own burning hair and flesh overcame his other senses as he got within point blank range of Suzuka, her rose colored eyes wide in surprise.
He understood how surprised she was, because he was just as surprised.

Loki shoved and twisted the dagger deep into her sternum, right where her heart would be if one still beat in her chest. Her lips parted as her body began to dissipate into light and stars. He'd think it poignant if he cared for such sentiment and beauty. Clint and Thor probably would. He tried to inhale and say something, but his lungs refused to operate. Maybe he inhaled too much smoke… maybe his chest cavity had been roasted away. He refused to fully absorb how much damage her youki fire has raged against his broken body.

Broken Blade…

"Kiki…you're dead too, and so blue." She murmured, her fading eyes piercing his own. Could she really see the Other's blue magic lacing his own mind? Could she see his own depthless melancholy? As she vanished into the sky he could blearily make out behind her the extent of the damage of her firestorm.

At least a kilometer of the surrounding area had been torched asunder. Buildings lay in ash, trees burned, countless bodies, Chitauri and mortal, lay prone in the flaming aftermath. He had warned them that there would be mass casualties. He wondered if Rogers believed him now. Then everything tilted and suddenly all he saw was the hull of the Aethon, his fading oleander shield, and the swarms of Chitauri and streaks of Midgardian jets' missiles.

A yellow ray of youki struck the starboard side of the Aethon. Jaken.

Oh. His body hit the ground. He struggled to inhale, his chest wouldn't expand. No air. His head lulled to the side and he caught legs rushing, but no sound, the ringing and blood in his ears drowned out any sound that could have registered. His thoughts fogged and nothing but pain rushed into his brain. It crippled him, he couldn't move.

Maybe he had done enough? His magic reserves had all but tapped out; he couldn't grasp a single leaf of Yggdrasil's magic either. His mouth was so dry and his body spasmed from the chill. Cold. Him. A Jotun. Ha.

Death was cold. Always cold. His fall from the Bifrost nearly froze him solid. Sanctuary chilled him to nothing as well. He hoped when Clint finally perished of a natural, old mortal age he wouldn't feel this cold. Maybe someone would hold him…and that thought made his chest clench.

He'd die alone. That was ok, but not Clint. He would have someone to watch after him as he perished. Sho would have the foresight to ensure that for him. Sho was not warm, but he was observant. He'd do his best to ensure Clint made it through this invasion, or at least watch over him as he perished.

He heard something over the ringing in his ears. Shouting, gunfire, explosions vibrating the asphalt he lay on? No, It wasn't that…

The Aethon, their primary cannon had fully charged. It would render this entire anthill of a city into a crater with Clint along with it. The Nines, he just wanted peace. He tried to ball his fist, only to see that his right had been seared off at the wrist into a blackened nub. Oh. He really was in rough shape. He couldn't feel his legs.

He let his eyes close. Yggdrasil, the tree of life, could use his remaining life force for something worthwhile. Loki had never been one for selfless sacrifice, but he knew a smart tactic when it presented itself to him. He resented he would never get to exact his revenge on Odin for keeping all those secrets and deceiving him and killing Suzu, so. but maybe this would allow him to enter
Valhalla and see his mother one more time.

Frigga…witness this. Witness your son make one positive impact.

He opened his eyes to heavens as if to will her to scry this exact moment.

Loki relaxed his whole body and he sensed all his energy rush into his chest and spin itself into a tight green ball. A seed. A kernel of a last ditch tactic.

A yellow ray of youki shot out to strike the cannon but was canceled out by the secondary aft cannon. The smaller aft cannon fired again and again and again. Lighting arced around the ship, but suddenly stopped. It really was up to him. How predictable.

Clint, maybe in another timeline, they could have been something more…

He pushed and willed every last bit of himself into that seed as the Cannon reached the pinnacle of its devastating power. Loki wondered what tree would sprout and erupt from his life energy… Pine like his scent? He had always been fond of Olive Trees. Loki’s eyes rolled up and into the back of his head as his body succumbed to the heavy, icy chill.

A tingling sensation of a mighty rush of life rippled through his body as a tree trunk punched up into the sky. A rush of roots webbed out across the asphalt, concrete, and grass. The trunk of a massive sequoia tree impaled straight through the hull of the Aethon and its primary cannon.

Sequoia? Maybe Clint was right, he was stronger than he believed.

The branches speared and lanced out from inside the Aethon, crunching its metal, disabling its cannons and destroying their engines. The giant, green magic sequoia began to tear the Aethon apart, moans and groans of metal shrieked through the air. Shrapnel fell from its hull and struck his resuscitated oleander shield, disintegrating the metal.

Good. The ship won't crush the city. Their Broken Blade breaks their Swiftest Cruiser. He let his eyes close again.

It wasn't a lie, what he said to Suzuka. Beings like him and Suzuka didn't get a second chance at life. He had envisioned himself lasting longer against the Mad Titan's forces, but Mephisto just had to bring back the one near-invincible opponent to change that.

They countered his strategy perfectly, but they didn't count on Clint.

Vibrations of heavy boots registered next to his head. Probably a Chitauri to finish him off. He forced himself to open his dry, itching eyes. He would look this Chitauri in the face when he died. Always look death right in the eye, Suzuka knew that too. She looked him in the eyes.

His vision warped and focused on... The Captain?! Rogers? His mask had been torn away, though he was bloody and bruised he had all his limbs. Fortunate.

"Loki...you're...literally black and blue...uh...hold on we can get a medic down here. You're a God, right? You've survived being a POW, you got this." The captain knelt down and from this angle he could see the underside of his jaw had soot and blood crusted all underneath it. Loki couldn't find his voice, but he didn't need to say anything as the Captain touched his shoulder and that's when Loki saw it.

His skin.
A charred Jotun blue.

That's what Suzuka meant by 'so blue'. She hadn't meant his sadness; her youki had actually dismantled Odin's glamour. He wondered absently if all of his skin was blue. Were his eyes red? Did their captain know what this meant?

At least Clint was far enough away to not see the monster he truly was. He saw instead the chosen, empty vessel for Yggdrasil's magic.

"Stay with us. I don't... I don't even know how you managed to last this long. Clint is on his way, Thor is caught up with some of the leviathan... god damnit... Loki." Roger's cursed for the scant few times Loki could remember.

He didn't think this is what he would do to cause the good captain to curse.

Loki wouldn't be able to say goodbye to him. To Clint. That somehow caused a far deeper, plunging torment in his chest than any fire could.

"You did it, you brought it down, just stay with us ok? We need you...eyes on me. Focus on me. You can do this, you're Loki you're stronger than this. You're good, you hear me? Good! Medic! We need one here now!" Roger's called out in vain. No mortal doctor could save him. He doubted even one on Asgird or Vanaheim could either.

Need? The mortals who once scorned him, who once called for his death stated they needed him? No, that's the precise reason he had Odin summon Sesshomaru here. He could carry the mantle from here. He understood the threat now.

He had more to say. But what? He had started this battle with so much hate, so much anger. He fell short of his goal, of his chance to finally slay the Other.

Yet, despite his best efforts, he couldn't get angry. He couldn't get mad for once in his life where it made sense.

What did he want his final words to be? Ones of reassurance? Grit? Ardor? He couldn't burden Clint with his affections. Not when death had him by the throat. Clint deserved better than that....

But that selfishness reared its ugly head. Maybe he wanted him to know...

No.

If he could be selfless to any being in this realm he could be selfless to Clint.

Maybe a clue. A... inside joke.

'So I keep it low, keep a secret code, 
So everybody else don't have to know'

The Kanye West Album.

Through sheer force of will he lifted his finger and with it plumed just enough magic to give their weary captain a final message. The drumbeat of his heart began to thump just a little slower.

'808s'

He rather liked that album by that Midgardian singer Kanye. He had hoped he could listen to it with Clint once more before he perished, but fortune never smiled on him. Ever.
And second chances were for beings like Sho, and Thor, ones who didn't crawl in the shadows and use people.

"808s? I don't get it Loki…Loki… I don't know what that means! Not your funeral, not here. Not yet, God please." Rogers plead, but no amount of please to some nonsense deity could save him from the reach of death. A drop of water hit Loki. Was it rain or something else? Sweat? No one could cry over him, especially not Captain Rogers.

He hoped Clint wouldn't. He would miss him, love him more than anyone would ever know.

Clint's humble smile, his fresh cotton smell, his yawns, his voice like water overrapids, his wit, his honestly, his light. The feel of his skin, so real and so full of life.

'Real life, what does it feel like?
I ask you tonight, I ask you tonight
What does it feel like, I ask you tonight
To live a real life.'

'Pinocchio Story,' did he live a real life? Loki didn't know, but the light that Clint gave off made him hope he did.

The resplendent, emerald sequoia tree, along with the oleander shield fizzled and evaporated into a glimmering jade mist, taking with it Loki's heartbeat.

Loki of Asgard was no more.

Chapter End Notes

Hello dear readers! I am back! I took a break when I got a new promotion and I am now able to balance my time a lot better!

Yes, yes, I am evil.

Please let me know how you liked this one!

-TL
Clint and the Graveyard Spiral

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Clint and the Graveyard Spiral

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A Graveyard Spiral in the world of aviation, is when a pilot experiences spatial disorientation and loses awareness of the aircraft’s attitude. In other words: you think you're flying with your wings level, but really you're about to spiral to your death. Clint knew the definition of that as well as he knew the back of his own hand.

Clint had never piloted a Graveyard Spiral before. He had been in one, when that pilot 'with the hair' lost concentration.

The acid of panic climbing up his throat told him clear as day that he was experiencing one now.

Only he wasn't piloting a plane.

He was watching the love of his life get incinerated.

(*(*

"Hey, hey, Hey! Nat said we gotta meet in like, twenty minutes and you know to Nat that means ten." Clint's smile brightly curled his cheeks as Loki caged him from above with pale, toned arms.

"All I need is five." Loki pounced quick to nip quick, mischievous kisses down his chest. Clint rolled his eyes, but he relished it. He never thought he’d be the kind of guy who required this much attention. He was used to being the one giving the attention, being the doting boyfriend, holding open doors, holding hands, holding purses…

Loki sucked a kiss right at the juncture of his right leg and his cock. This GUY.

"You're distracted." Loki almost pouted and Clint huffed and bent over and hauled up the sulky god to his eye level. While Loki intently tried to make sure he was good and fucked for like, life, Clint was fine for the moment. He didn't want a blow job, right now, even though he wasn't going to necessarily stop Loki if he wanted to give one to him.

He wanted Loki to have what he wanted. After all, he was a bit of a softie, and sometimes even a pushover.

But really.

They were about to haul out in an tactical defensive to DC. The Aethon and the Nycteus had begun to move from the dark side of the moon and he just wanted Loki tucked in beside him. Maybe he was turning into the biggest bleeding heart romantic after all. Over Loki, God of Mischief, Lies, Sex, Calamity, Mayhem, and pouting.

Taking a deep inhale he smile small. He wouldn't change a thing. But he wasn't about to let Loki
know this. His head would explode from the ego boost.

"Come'ere. Yeah, I'm distracted by...us." Clint wasn't sure where he was going with any of this, but it felt right to say. Loki, uncharacteristically, placed his head on Clint's chest and Clint carded his fingers through Loki's silky hair, detangling it.

"Us?" Loki repeated, lips brushing his chest. Clint almost thought he came across as thoughtful. Clint wapped his other arm tight around Loki's upper back, feeling the strong traps under his slightly sweaty skin. Clint didn't know why, but he could sense that Loki needed comfort here. Clint could tell Loki wasn't the type of person to actively seek something out like this.

He wondered, now, if Loki felt like deserved it.

"Yeah. Us. I know its colossally bad timing to be getting together, Alien invasion and end of the world and all, but...I don't know. This feels nice. Ugh, nevermind. That sounded dumb. It's good. We're good. We work. I like us, together." Holy. Shit. Clint. Could you be less articulate? Was he always this bad at talking about relationship...stuff?

Wait.

Seriously, when was the last time he talked about this sort of thing? It had been a while. Long while.

Maybe not since Jake was locked-up back in Iowa for assault. He was with someone then. Jenny? Maybe? They had a fight when he took another one of their date weekends to visit him. She had a point, Jake's wife and kids would visit. He didn't need to. Maybe that was a sign they weren't working. Priorities.

Loki shifted and caressed his fingers down his side and his fingers dancing across his skin felt way more hot, way more pleasing than it really should.

Clint wondered what hot-shit snarky comment Loki would say next.

"Clint, thank you." Loki's voice hovered barely above a whisper. Clint almost thought it sounded somber. He scratched a bit behind Loki's ear, thinking.

"For wha-" Clint was cut off by a sharp knock at the door and in a poof of green smoke Loki disappeared as if startled or shocked. Clint made a face he knew that had to be Nat. It was her knock.

Why would that spook Loki?

"Almost ready!" He called out. He waited a minute for Loki, but he never reappeared or teleported back or whatever he did. He got geared up, he had a new custom recurve bow and the fancy gold one he just called Val.

Just what was Loki thanking him for? And why did it leave a really bad taste in his mouth?

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Fire.
No.

Firestorm.

No.

Inferno. A deafening inferno.

The entire Capitol building, National Gallery, Air and Space Museum, National Museum of Art, Smithsonian, all strangled in flames. They'd all be nothing but ash in no time.

And the HEAT. He'd never felt anything like it. Demon fire burned hotter than napalm.

Clint didn't care.

He didn't give a loose shit in India.

He just kept tugging arrows out of his quiver and shouting into his com. He would fire every arrow he had.

The smoke stung sharp and hot in his eyes and lungs, making it near impossible for a regular agent to get off any shot. But he wasn't a regular agent. The Chitauri swarmed everywhere, never giving him an opening, much less a chance to breathe. Rage and frustration fueled every snipe, and every headshot. Clint's senses tunneled deep in the zone, like a machine he churned out clean kill after clean kill.

It wasn't enough. He had to up his game, use his magic.

He had to matter here.

Of all his gear that had to fall, he had to lose the damn magic bow. Nice fuck up Clint.

Clint kept charging towards the edge of the roof, despite the risk of a Chitauri hitting him dead on (even though none explicity did), he had to get some space to get Val.

Val had been shot from his utility belt at the very beginning of the battle and had fallen down from the top level of the roof he was perched on, to the lower one. He had to get down there without breaking his neck.

Anything else broken. Fine.

Loki.

He was fighting an Angel of Death and losing. His chest constricted like a ravenous shark had clamped down on it and began to shred it.

Clint could see the green magic fading fast in the throes of the most horrifying wildfire Clint had ever seen. Clint had seen modern day Napalm used from the Mark-77 bomb. It had NOTHING on this.

They weren't prepared for this. No fire team could put out all these Demon flames.

But, Clint could.

He just needed Val, and to sink one magic arrow in that Angel's forehead. Just like Nate showed him with deer all those years ago, he would hunt this Demon Angel.
Clint Barton, Demon Slayer. He just needed his damn bow.

'Keep fighting Loki, I know you can.' Clint, finally with an opening, shot a grappling arrow into the outer wall of the Museum of Natural History and flung himself down onto a rough, sunfaded rooftop not far above the raging sea of fire.

He had to back up Loki.

Loki.

He stored his usual recurve bow, and tumbled and dove, scrabbling to clutch the Magic one. Val instantly warmed in his hand, a different kind of warm than the heat radiating from the National Mall.

"Gotta go." Clint swallowed; his pulse was a snare drum in his neck. He bolted up to the raised edge of the tarred roof. The ceaseless waves of heat and choking smoke radiating from the fires from here would have overwhelmed a lesser agent.

He didn't know how Loki held out as long as he already had.

Loki stood as a slim emerald oasis in a raging desert of orange flame and black smoke.

"I got you!" He didn't know if he was yelling at the Demon Angel, or calling out to Loki but he pulled back the glimmering string of Ichaival.

Clint shouldn't be focusing on the Demon Angel. He was ordered to kill as many Chitauri as possible to keep them from leeching into the parts of Washington DC that may have not been fully evacuated.

Orders be damned. Loki needed him. Plus he had been doing a fine job sniping the Chitauri.

The God he was absolutely crazy about needed him. Clint wiped his brow. It dawned on him that really told Loki how much he meant. How crazy he drove him. How much he had to run his fingers through his tangly hair again.

He'd get the chance. He would.

Clint's hands never trembled, but...If he didn't step up here...

If he didn't have Loki's back…

They were partners, dammit. A team, and It was about time he carried his weight. He just had to focus on forming that magic bolt again, and not the sweat pouring down his brow. A thin rod of purple formed and rapidly warped into a honed, tipped arrow. He readied his aim right at her furious face.

'Eat my magic dust.' Clint sneered and let the arrow fly. Despite the magic arrow having no weight, the bowstring didn't snap.

Clint held his breath as the arrow zipped as purified purple streak, clearing the air of the youki fire smoke and fire as it went. Wait, did that mean he could put out some of these fires? No time to worry about that now. He'd let the whole damn city burn to save Loki.

He kept the air in his lungs, pent up as if he exhaled the arrow wouldn't sing true.

C'moooonnnnn hit!
He smirked too soon.

At the last possible second she blurred away from it. Clint's heart stopped and stuffed itself into his throat. She was just as fast as Fancy Pants. In a straight fight Clint would be hard pressed to land anything against him. It was the same with this Angel bitch.

This…wasn't good.

He couldn't give u— a ray blast from a Chitauri whizzed by him, almost taking his blockhead clean off.

Without missing a beat he fired back with Val and hit the Chitauri clean through his chest, burning a bright purple hole though his sternum that ripped through him and the Chitauri behind him. In any other fight, Clint would have thought it was cool his magic arrows basically melted through the Chitauri. Not here.

He turned his attention back towards the black and green smudge that was slowly smoldering out.

"LOKI!" Clint yelled hoarsely through the coiling smoke.

He saw the faint glow of his green magic against the gold trumpet of the Angel. He had to keep trying. Maybe he could hit her if Loki distracted her.

Yeah. This was Loki, God of Mischief and Chaos. He survived The Other torturing him and Asgardian prison and they'd get through this because they were Avengers and that's what they did. Survive.

This was just some angry ex-girlfriend. He drew back a second arrow, and it flared to life like a live wire.

"Dodge this, bitch." He shot true, but Clint's exhale stuck in his lungs. Her face contorted into this menacing sneer and a circle of crimson fire spun around her trumpet. A sharp, pervasive dread knotted itself deep in his chest.

"Look out!" Clint screamed and time slowed down. His arrow slogged through the smoke as if anchored.

Too slow. Like slow motion.

The wheels of searing flame accelerated. They careened right towards Loki like hellfire. But he could teleport away. Right?!

Teleport!

Instead, Loki looked back and Clint swore they made eye contact. His armor, charred from the flames revealed savage third degree burns and Loki's singed hair flickered as flames. His arrow streamed towards Loki, but his magic didn't seem strong enough, quick enough.

He reached out his dagger back to him, as if waiting for something. The bitter tang of panic pooled in the base of Clint's throat.

Why did this this feel just like before in bed?

Like goodbye?

"LOKI, PLEASE!" He yelled out, coughing on smoke. "GET OUT OF THE WAY!" Clint's pulse
jacked itself high like a rabbit's in his neck. The tornado of fire closed in, enveloping him as if he had never been there. The acrid smoke choked the sky around him, but Clint could still see his fading green magic. Even with his eyesight, he couldn't exactly see his facial features, but he could tell Loki wasn't smiling, and he wasn't angry.

He was just like he was three years ago. Serious and set. Terror trickled thinly down Clint's spine.

Time stopped still. The crackle and roar of the fire, silent. The whizzing Chitauri, vanished. Loki was ready for something.

Was he too late again?

The flames closed in.

The green magic snuffed out in an instant.

"LOKI!" Clint screamed high as his violet arrow sang through the flames. "LOKI! FUCK, LOKI!"

His heart stung. Why. Why when it mattered why did he always fail?! Too late.

He strung back another arrow when suddenly the flames at the epicenter of the inferno tempered. A faint violet slice cut through the smoke.

Loki.

Clint finally exhaled.

He spotted through the hazy smoke a dark was slumped forward with a dagger glowed purple deep in the chest of the angel. The smoke obscured any details, but Clint could at least make out he was standing.

"Thank God." Clint wheeze as the angel vanished into stars. "Thank…" and this wasn't fair. The haze lifted. Loki barely looked recognizable, his armor burned and scorched off his body.

Loki slumped backwards, staggering and crumpling like carbon paper.

Clint's jaw slackened.

Loki hit the pavement.

Did he even have any skin left? It was all black and blue. He didn't have any hair left either. That soft hair… the smooth skin… It didn't matter if he had a pulse. He just needed a pulse…maybe a smile.

Ichaival burned in his grip then flashed icy and cold. Instinctively, he knew Ichaival was talking to him just like Tenseiga and Bakusaiga did.

"Stay with me, I'll be right the—" Clint got cut off by a smattering of ray blasts crumbling the roof beneath him. His heart reached his throat when his feet fell to air. He took out his recurve bow, but it took a fraction more slowly than it should have if he had his recurve bow out to begin with.

Jesus, what kind of archer carried around two bows?! He fought the panic as he fastened Ichaival quickly to his belt, whipped out a grappling arrow and fired it into the stone. He waited for the satisfying catch of the cable and was about to swing to the scaffolding.
The cable went slack and Clint's stomach lodged in his throat.

The stone jolted loose as soon as soon as the arrow cable held his full weight.

He was going to plummet his death in the fire sea.

Shit.

"I got your six, Clint!" Clint almost got the wind knocked out of him as he was caught by bulky metal arms. Rhodey thank the lord.

Clint craned his neck back to the still raging firestorm to spot Loki, but couldn't spot him, the angle was off.

An ear splitting crumbling rumble echoed through the air as a mushroom cloud of ash and dirt bloomed into the hazy sky. The Capitol building finally collapsed in a grey, ashen implosion. It should have really chilled him more, to see such a prominent symbol of America to fall, but it didn't hardly phase him. It was just a building. It could be rebuilt.

Loki couldn't be rebuilt.

Nate. The gun, the stream.

Pietro. The weights, the lake.

Loki. The angel, the fire sea.

"Put me down next to Loki, I gotta help him out." Clint insisted, but Rhodes didn't double back.

"Are you crazy? You'll be burned alive, I can't even get near it! Plus Thor and Tony need our cover fire!" Rhodes's usually steady voice sounded confused and panicked. He cruised low and Clint struggled. He had his back to Rhodes, and he was awkwardly held with the back of his head against his chest.

He knew a part of what he said made sense, but he could dispel the Demon Fire with Ichaival. He saw the purple arrow purify the Demon Smoke.

"Rhodes just put me down!" Clint got what he asked for.

A cannon strike shocked into Rhodes somewhere. Rhodes didn't even yell. In a second they spiraled tightly down to the pavement. Rhodes grip went slack at the last moment and he slipped free as they careened towards the ground.

Graveyard Spiral.

Rhodes' suit broke the fall and Clint's body rocked from the sudden, jarring impact. His vision swam and blacked out into spots. His ribs positively killed. Bruised at least, most likely cracked. Clint's body practically bounced and rolled out onto the pavement.

Clint groaned, ok, that was definitely worse than having Fancy Pants catch him in his pelt thing. Clint gazed up into the sky, catching the main cannon of the Aethon firing up.

"Rhodes, c'mon we gotta-" Clint gasped, uncharacteristically. Eyes wide, chest heavy.

Where Rhodes' helmet, head, should be, was nothing but blood. The cannon must have taken a clean shot. Clint ran a hand through his hair and felt tacky, sticky mess.
"Rhodes..."He didn't even want to look at it as he flung it the excess...brain goop? off onto the cement. Was that rude to do? Oh damn.

"Shit...Rhodes..." Dead. Rhodes was dead and it was his fault.

If he hadn't dropped Ichaival….or been at his post….

No. He didn't have time to process this.

He had to keep moving. He couldn't help Rhodes now, but he could help Loki.

"Man… man down. Rhodes. God. Nothing I can do for him. KIA repeat. KIA. God. I'm so sorry." Clint forced the bile in his throat down like a punch to someone's kidney. Why was it now that he couldn't get his shit together? He had training for this. He had seen worse, far worse…

This was not the first ally he had seen die. Not the first friend. Not that Rhodes and he were that friendly.

Damnit.

"Clint this isn't funny. Position." Tony chattered in his ear and asked for his position as if he didn't already know it or could scan for it.

"I can't do anything for him. Tony, I'm sorry, I can't. Position in front of Air and Space Museum. I'm on the move to Loki." Clint wasn't going to even bother with Tony berating him. He couldn't resuscitate someone who didn't have a head. He couldn't stay with someone who he couldn't help when there was someone he loved and could help dying in a fire.

Clint took off in a wind sprint fighting his ribs and dodging errant Chitauri blasts and finding of all things a damned bicycle.

He grabbed it off the street, thanked his lucky stars the tires were intact and pedaled like a madman. He sort of felt like a fool cycling during an alien invasion, but everything else around him was in ruin and if got him to Loki faster, he didn't give a damn.

Love.

Damnit Loki hang in there.

Loki had told him on at least two occasions that he, Thor, and Sesshomaru weren't immortal, but that didn't mean he'd die at the first battle ri—

The hair on the back of Clint's neck pricked up and he looked up.

The Aethon's primary cannon whittled and pulsed an otherworldly ultraviolet light. Clint didn't need to be genius Tony Stark to know that cannon could wipe out the entire city of DC with a single, shattering blast.

Fuck.

They lost.

Two electric yellow beams lasered with pinpoint accuracy to the cannon on the Aethon, obliterating the violet shield to grey dust. Clint chanced a look down the mall towards the Potomac river.
A translucent, horrifying Sea Serpent with glowing neon eyes howled into the sky.

Go Frogger go!

One more hit after disabling the shields and the cannon should be taken out! Clint silently cheered to himself as he pedaled closer and closer to the raging wildfire. He chanced a look back to see Jaken, eyes glowing, being lassoed in place by magic harnesses of over a dozen Chitauri chariots.

If Jaken didn't have the movement freedom to dive into the river to dodge the cannons…

ZING. POP. POP. POP.

Clint pursed his lips as the aft cannons fired mercilessly towards the direction of Jaken. Clint's mouth dried out to powder as the cannons pummeled Jaken's sharp face head on before he could recharge.

An otherworldly shriek speared the air and rattled his spine. A similar dormant inherent fear to the first time he encountered Bakusaiga needled deep in his spine. As a dark blue, viscous blood gushed and sprayed through the sky, Clint inherently knew one fact: Jaken was dying.

"This whole op is going sideways…" This couldn't really be happening, could it? He had prepared for this his whole life. He could eat a bullet for SHIELD on any assignment, at any battlefront, in any scenario.

Yet, this sixth sense of his was pinging off the map. His skin crawled, jittery and erratic across the nape of his neck and down his back.

He heard voices chattering in his scrambled com, but couldn't actually register them. He knew one call was Cap rushing to Loki's position. He was closest trying to secure Chitauri from getting down into the metro tunnels.

He knew Cap wouldn't leave Loki hanging. He trusted him.

Clint's legs and lungs burned tightly as debris and blasts crashed around him, miraculously missing him. It had to be that magic spell Loki put on him, he thought. Loki's lucky magic spell. He was always looking after him and now he had to-

Clint swerved as a blinding purple light radiated from the bow of the Aethon. The pulse cannon. Primed and ready it pivoted and lurched down towards the city. Clint’s breath caught in his throat like a nest of barbed wire.

Was anyone close by? What happened to Jaken? Tony? Thor!??

He caught a glimpse of lightning crackle far away and a holler over the coms told him Tony had found Rhodes. Clint ignored the pang of guilt. He had a purpose. A rumbling vibration sung through the air and deep into his bones. A sphere of pure purple energy had crested the mouth of the cannon.

They were toast.

Clint kept pedaling like a maniac anyway because he'd rather die in action than standing slack jawed at some dipshit alien space cruiser. Loki was right… his sixth sense was right on target.

They're were all going to die.
At least Nat, Bruce, and Fancy Pants were still kicking. Thor might make it too. If Tony made it at least he couldn't hate him long for killing his best friend.

Clint had reached the edge of the inferno and to his panic and dismay, realized it was impassible. Not for long. He took out Ichaival and fired a shot through the fire.

The fire snuffed out a tunnel through the fire that immediately closed back up.

"Shit!" He gritted out as he heat from the fire blew out the front tire and he nearly flipped over the handle bars. He bailed and immediately started running, Ichaival gripped in his hand as he began to shoot outlying Chitauri still firing down upon the scorched sidewalk in front of him. He had to find an opening in the fire.

"Enough already!" Clint turned another Chitauri into goo as he continued to try to find any break in the fire.

Then the air jolted with an underlying, tense electricity. Clint's mouth would have run dry if he hadn't already been breathless. Ichaival warmed against his chest where he had slung the bow around him.

Green.

Emerald green magic punched upwards like a huge tree.

LOKI.

He still had enough energy to do that?!

Clint allowed himself to watch as a torrent of sparkling magic grew rapidly into a mighty redwood tree. The magic branches sprung and twined out, grappling and crunching the Aethon's hull. The grating, shriek of metal grinding against itself almost drowned out the explosions puckering down the length of its side. The monumental tree positively crushed the cannon with its powerful branches and sharp leaves.

Yet, another thought shocked his mind. Sesshomaru and the interceptor! He kited the ship away from the center of New York so the ship wouldn't fall and basically turn them into mush. Clint's worry eased as the shrapnel that blasted through the air didn't hail down on any of them. When they struck the green magic shields they all disintegrated into dust.

Ichaival burned against his chest as he coasted his bicycle to a stop.

"He saved us." Clint's panic warmed and smoothed his lungs into relief. Not just for everyone, but if Loki had that much magic left then he had to be alright. He had to have healed himself just like he did after the sniper shots.

The raging fire that threatened to burn the rest of the buildings in the mall to ashes from Suzuka's feathers had been snuffed out as well. He was almost past the Smithsonian to where Loki was. He could cover that distance despite the smoke inhalation in his lungs.

Ichaival, just like the air, cooled and chilled against his arm as he continued his sprint.

"Loki…I'm almost there." Clint hadn't even realized he had said that into the com when he heard a surprising response from Steve to hurry.

Hurry? Why? Loki had just decimated the Aethon. He just won them this battle so he had to…
No.

"I existed once, I truly did, you know that."

"Don't ever think you're anything near as disgraceful as I."

"Thank you."

He WOULDN'T.

He couldn't have….have…

Nate's brown eyes and Pantera posters, smoking himself out to calm his Demons.

Pietro's curly blond hair and Addidas track suits, gambling his paycheck away to pay off those human traffickers.

Loki's predatory green eyes and his ace up his sleeve.

Steve called for a medic over the com and Clint could have set a world record in the 400 meter dash towards the center of the ashen mall. He saw Steve and a group of other soldiers closing in on Loki's position, making a perimeter, firing at Chitauri that converged on their position due to the lack of smoke and flames.

He couldn't be too late.

Clint didn't remember covering the distance between the Smithsonian and where Loki lay, but he did.

He skidded to a halt on the ash, slick like dead leaves.

Steve fronted strong in his space saying something, but all he heard was buzzing and white noise. He pushed Steve aside and a part of him knew that Steve must have let him because there was no way he could actually shove Steve on his own strength.

Loki had told him on more than one occasion that he wasn't immortal, but it didn't really sink in. Loki was…too smart. Too resilient. He survived. That's what he did. He promised to be his shadow. To stick by his side, to always be there, flickering and moving when he did.

So why was he so still, when he was still moving?

Why was his skin blue, and what were these raised lines?

Why were his irises red? They were supposed to be green. His green.

Why wasn't he blinking?

Third degree burns charred at least sixty… seventy percent of his body… but he was Loki, tougher than a a human. Way tougher.

Clint scrabbled his hand on Loki's blistered, flaking chest and choked back something like a thick sob. With his other he cupped his blistered cheek and recoiled at how his cold skin bit him.

Ice cold.

Not good.
Clint's hands shook for the first time in a long, long time.

CPR.

"Not you too…." Clint grunted and went to perform CPR when Steve hauled him off Loki with an embarrassingly placid display of strength.

Clint snarled and almost jacked back to sock Steve right in the chest.

"Clint. He's gone. He's gone and so is Colonel Rhodes, Jaken, and countless more. The Chitauri and the Leviathans are still decimating DC and we need to fight them off. We need you, especially if more Demon Spirits come. We need you, Clint." Steve's eyes softened in grief and Clint swallowed and relaxed a little.

He pursed his lips and swore he heard Loki's laughter ring in his ears.

"He… didn't…couldn't say anything, but he did leave me a message. He wrote '808s'. I don't know wha—" Clint cut him off with a gruff, clap of a laugh. He didn't even recognize his own, scratchy voice.

"808's and Heartbreak. It's an album we listened to. I'm too late, again." Clint said, almost robotically. It was the last album they listened to together. The last.

His mind flashed to the Scorpions blasting on the cassette tape in Nate's f-150. That awful Russian trance techno Pietro blasted on his boombox.

The gunshot.

The lake.

Loki and the fire.

"Clint, I'm sorry, but we gotta keep moving before more are lost." Steve's voice sounded like a whip even though Clint was certain that was the opposite of his intention. Steve's hand rested on his back and it was then that Clint had realized he was bent over, buckled like he was about to wretch.

Clint swallowed hard. He couldn't allow his mind to process this right now. Steve was right, they had a battle to win. If he didn't help win back DC then not only Loki's sacrifice would be in vain, but Rhodes' Jaken's and so many others would be as well.

But seriously…this couldn't be happening. He couldn't be this useless.

No. He wasn't useless. He was an Avenger. If he was going to be too late saving Loki, he would damn sure Avenge him. His heart rate spiked so fast he could feel it drum in his neck.

"Where do you need me?" Clint asked, and Ichaival glowed a wicked purple.

He was going to do some damage. Real damage.

Chitauri buzzed around him and he wasted no time sniping five from the sky with shimmering magic bolts. He hadn't even registered pulling Ichaival's bowstring back five times.

He smirked as the Chitauri powdered out to purple sand.

They were going to pay for this. He'd take Thanos on himself, He'd sink so many arrows into his
face dental records wouldn't be possible.

"The leviathan are congregating near the Lincoln Memorial, we think they may make a move on
Reagan International Airport, or possibl—" Clint tuned Steve out as spotted one of his favorite
things, a police motorcycle laid out on the ground under some debris

He sprinted over to it as a crook of lightning split the asphalt to his right.

He didn't have time for Thor. His reaction would undo him. He liked Thor, really, but he just
couldn't deal with his protective big brother act that he only put on when it was convenient for him.

So, he admitted it, maybe he was bitter. Maybe he was holding a grudge for Asgard, but if that's
what it took right now to get through this, he was OK with that.

He had done worse things. Was about to do worse things.

"Brother…you can't be…" Thor's voice rasped out smoky and stilted. Thor's reaction was
completely different than when Loki was sniped back in New York. Instead of raw and red anger,
he blanked out, all drifting, pale and quiet.

Where were you Thor, Mr. protective big brother?

Clint's fist glowed ultraviolet as he put away Ichaival and picked up the dinged motorcycle, one
blue light still flashing intermittently.

"He is… fuck he is, OK Thor?! HE'S DEAD! DEAD! SO, LET'S GO." Clint yelling hoarsely at
the brother of a Demigod probably wasn't his smartest move, but the buzzing and crackling in his
chest drove him to lash out.

"He used his very body as a vessel for Yggdrasil…" Thor continued as if he hadn't even heard Clint
which should have pissed him off more, but didn't because it wasn't like he and Thor were all that
great of friends anyway. If Thor wanted to play sad, older brother right now, Steve could deal with
it.

He swung his right leg over the bike and revved it. It barked to life. His throat clamped suddenly
shut, he thought of that pool game in that bar, where Loki sank that behind-the-back shot.

He'd never get to ride a Ducati with Loki.

He'd never get a rematch at billiards. Those long fingers tented on the green felt, the cue resting on
his scarred knuckles.

The shower and the suds. Diva.

No.

Focus, Clint. Damnit.

"I'm going after that Leviathan, Steve." He blamed his wet cheeks on the wind that whipped by
him as he trailed a gliding leviathan. The massive alien groaned out low and Clint wasted no time
steadying the bike, and pulling back the gleaming string of Ichaival.

Lightning spiraled all around him, and peals of grumbling thunder echoed through encroaching
thunderheads. It finally sunk in for Thor.

"This is for Rhodes." Clint muttered and from the twang of the bowstring erupted a flare of violet.
Raw, unfocused, and lethal, the purple ray of energy zigzagged towards the Leviathan.

The violet bolt flared a brilliant magenta when it struck the leviathan right behind its jaw. A rough, blackened, puckering welt erupted out across its skin along with fading rays of purple light.

The wounded Leviathan let out a terrific roar and dropped from the sky like a wet rug into what was left of the reflecting pool. Clint wanted to feel that rush of victory, but that horrible buzzing just kept slicing through his chest. He didn't feel any better even though he had just taken out a leviathan with a single shot.

He didn't even marvel at how much better he had gotten with Val. He just did it and he'd do it again.

Clint didn't break concentration as he put his left hand back onto the throttle and sped closer to the Lincoln Memorial for another killshot on the last three remaining Leviathan.

He was going to take them all out. He was going to-

Tony's damaged, but still half functioning, suit landed right in front of him and he braked the bike to a squealing stop.

"Tony, what?!" Clint snapped.

"You were either ignoring your com, or it got shorted out by Thor's tantrum. Cap and I will handle these guys, you and Thor have to head back to Stark Tower. Now. " Tony ordered and Clint's eyebrows furrowed. What did he miss? Irritation caused Clint's neck to itch.

"What's going on at Stark Tower? Why can't you go?" Clint sniped back with questions. He was needed on the front-lines. He had to do more damage. He had to avenge more. He couldn't just go back to the safe-zone. What the hell was Jarvis for anyway?!

"Suit's too damaged to make it in time to respond, But Thunderclap can still sprint. Demon Spirits have infiltrated the tower. You have to go back and protect Pepper, Sunshine, and Inky because you're the only one who can exorcise them. Clint, I get it, I get what you want to do here, but go. Please." Tony's voice didn't really sound like Tony's voice just then. It almost sounded like a plea. Tony never plead.

Rhodes.

Tony lost Rhodes.

No. He took Rhodes from Tony.

He couldn't let himself process that guilt either. Death happened in war. It just happened.

"Yeah, of course." What else could he say?

He was the only one who could dust these Demon spirits. And Rin, she was in danger. He couldn't handle it if anything happened to her. He couldn't allow her to get hurt. Especially if Fancy Pants and Nat, whose coms died off long ago, hadn't...

No. He had to believe they were fine.

Well, Fancy Pants wouldn't be once he heard what happened to Loki. And Jaken.
It was crazy thinking how just a couple weeks ago he had just seen Loki as Fancy Pants. Shot him full of arrows. Those manic, twitchy hands all over his back...

NO. FOCUS.

"Hawk's eye, we must make haste. I fear something nefarious is underway." Thor failed to sound as commanding as he probably wanted but Clint wasn't going to argue. Thor's lightning had subsided somewhat, but mjolnir shook in his white-knuckled grip.

If he couldn't light the enemy up here, he'd do it in Tony's overly-designed living room. He'd work this out of his system. He wouldn't be too late for Rin and Pepper.

"I think it's a little late Thor, this whole fubar situation is nefarious." Clint bit grimly as Thor placed a dusty, meaty hand on his shoulder. His busted knuckles bled a bit.

"Aye…I take responsibility for this. I should not have let Loki take on that Demoness alone." Clint didn't bother to look up to Thor. That wasn't on him. It was on Clint. Thor couldn't have hit her with his lightning.

He should have put her down long before Loki got charred by her flames. But, he couldn't turn back time. He couldn't bring Loki back… he couldn't ever… no.

Clint sighed through his nose and clapped his own calloused hand on Thor's. His and Loki's hands couldn't be anymore dissimilar.

"It's… not on you." Thor's credit, he was holding together pretty well for someone who just lost a younger brother. Clint wasn't in the mood for humor, but he did lighten a bit at having to be picked up yet again.

"Aye, we shall Avenge my brother together, and protect Man of Iron's tower." Thor's chest vibrated deep and yeah, he and Thor were both Avengers and at the end of the day they were going to do what they needed.

For Loki. Rhodes. Even Little Green.

Oh shit, Fancy Pants was going to be so pissed they couldn't protect him. Any of them. He doubted he cared much for Rhodes, but Tony did.

Clint's stomach lurched as Thor launched himself into the air, Mjolnir leading. Wind and rain whipped and stung his face and Clint squinted his eyes shut. It just went to show the vast differences between himself and Thor that he could fly at speeds to rival the Quinjet.

Thor's vicegrip on his chest also reminded him that if he ever had to fly with a super being again, he'd take Fancy Pants' lightshow over this any day.

Clint actually much preferred being teleported but...

Clint inwardly winced. He wasn't about to touch that. He couldn't allow his emotions to control him. He controlled them, he was a soldier and a spy and he could handle this. Breathe in...breathe out. Inhale, exhale.

"-down." Clint couldn't hear Thor over the roar of the wind except that one word.

Down.
He let Loki down.

Clint swallowed and opened his eyes and while he couldn't make out much, he figured they had to be getting close because he swore they were slowing down somewhat.

How long had they been flying anyway? It couldn't have been more than a few seconds. Right?

Maybe not. Maybe he needed to focus more. Damn feedback loop, getting frustrated he wasn't focusing more was causing him NOT to focus.

Sure enough, he blinked a few times, bringing things into focus. and made out the Manhattan skyline they were careening towards. Nothing looked out of place, he couldn't make out any spaceships or Chitauri even.

That didn't mean nothing wasn't happening. Tony wouldn't have said 'please' if some serious shit wasn't going down.

With a crunching, quaking thud, Thor landed on the helipad of Stark Tower. Cracks and splintered concrete webbed out from his feet and Clint wasted no time shaking himself free of Thor's grasp.

So much for stealth.

Storm clouds conjured from nowhere from previously blue sky.

Clint wasted no time surveying the situation and instantly eyeing the door to staircase on the roof had been kicked in.

Was the attack on DC and Norfolk just feints? Was the attack on Stark Tower their primary target? What could they be…

The scepter!

"Thor, the scepter. Their objective is the scepter. They're going to try to steal it and…” Clint's mind finally caught up with what was really at play.

They'd been trying to capture Loki or Sesshomaru this whole time to get the cosmic gems. With Loki dead—not able to be turned by the scepter anymore, they could use the scepter on Sesshomaru, and there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it.

Fancy Pants was still cursed by the Other's magic. The scepter could turn him against them.

Clint's pulse spiked.

Clint's mind flashed to the scry Fancy Pants' mother showed them. Thor and Loki fighting against them… killing them. Only instead of Thor and Loki fighting against them, it could be Sesshomaru against them.

If Sesshomaru was turned against them without Loki to help… that could certainly tip the scales in the direction of their enemy. Maybe.

They still had Bruce and Thor. They could stop Fancy Pants.

Tony...well...Tony would probably get on board.

But, it still left a sharp ache in his gut.
Clint caught Thor's eyes as they widened in shock. He didn't know if Thor put all the pieces of puzzle together like he did, but he definitely realized enough.

"Thor, get to the scepter room now. I'll be right behind you." Clint ordered, not even stopping to consider he just ordered Thor around.

Thor flew off the side of the tower and Clint broke into a sprint to the edge of Stark Tower as well. He could get down there just fine on his own, and could flank Thor's initial attack.

The hacker must have been able to shut Jarvis down. He didn't hear any alarms going off, and the tower seemed utterly defenseless. Clint reeled, who would be in the tower...Pepper stayed behind, Polly the damned ice cream girl was in the tower too...Squirt! Rin.

No, Pepper would know exactly what to do. She would have taken them to safety as soon as Jarvis shut down. Pepper could have been a SHIELD agent if she had wanted.

Clint dove off the side of Stark tower, recurve bow in hand.

Wind whipped by him, but this time, he was completely in control, he streamlined his body and flipped to his back.

This time he'd stick the arrow.

10th story...
9th story...
8th story...
Now.

He whipped out his last grappling arrow, strung it like he had thousands of times before, and let her fly. It struck the side of Stark Tower and he swung through the glass on the second story.

Nat told him about the hidden ventilation shaft she used to drop in on Loki and Sesshomaru when they almost brought the whole tower down. He could access it on the second story.

As stealthy as he could be after making a mess of crashing broken glass, he made a bee line for the vent opening. He listened for any sort of sign of agents, aliens, humans, whatever roaming the halls but heard nothing.

Silence was never good.

No, they weren't too late. They had to still be in the tower. He kicked in the vent lid and immediately started shimmying down the vent shaft. The sounds here echoed a bit, and now if he really strained his senses, he could feel faint, uneven vibrations. A fight.

Thor had to be down there giving them hell.

He reached the part of the shaft where he'd have to drop a few floors and he braced himself for a bit until...

Fuck it.

He dropped the rest of the way.
Clint's boots hit the lid of the vent and it caved quick and he braced himself for an uneven landing when his chest, right where his tattoo was, warmed up quick.

Loki's protection magic? It still worked?!

Clint's feet connected with a SHIELD agent's head and shoulders and he immediately twisted his body into a takedown maneuver.

"Clint!" Polly called his name out just before gunshots erupted and Clint had a hairsbreadth of time to duck behind one of those many crates that Tony had moved into the hall to make room for the scepter containment room.

Bullets rang and splintered the wood of the boxes. Clint pulled out his recurve bow, he couldn't chance that Ichaival wouldn't work on normal, non-magic or demon enemies.

He didn't even need to look as he angle-shot two arrows, sinking them effortlessly into two of the agents. Polly should be able to get free now... well maybe he was thinking too much for her. She was just basically a kid with no training.

"They have Pepper! It's my fault, they're all in there with the scepter. Thor too. It's all my fault. I thought I heard something, but I didn't say anything...and it just happened so fast! Rin's gone somewhere...I don't know!" Polly called out, voice hoarse and panicked. Clint whipped around and saw her shaking due to shock and adrenaline.

He closed the distance and put a hand on her shoulder to steady her. She swallowed thickly, eyes wet.

"None of this is your fault. I'm going to get in there and Thor and I are going to set everything right. We will be fine, I need you to tell me who is in there and to get out of danger and hide. More will be on the way." Clint locked eyes with Polly, and she nodded firmly.

"OK, so like five agents, oh and Happy! I think Mis—Pepper knew one of them, a blue terminator chick, and maybe someone else. They took Pepper and I heard a crash so I'm pretty sure Thor had to be in there. I was going to find Rin, but then they chased me. We told her to run and hide, but I don't know where she went." Polly responded, fidgeting with her earrings.

"Yeah, find Rin, hide out till this blows over." Clint clapped his hand on her slim shoulder one last time. They should have never involved her in this. But he couldn't turn back time no matter how much he wished he could.

Clint switched bows and Ichaival thrummed to life in his hand as a steady stream of warmth.

He pushed his back flush up against the door. He could hear pounding on the other side but not much else. Tony had reinforced the door pretty well. No signs of tampering with the lock, they must have somehow hacked their way inside.

He inhaled deep. He had no way of knowing what was on the other side. What he was about to throw himself into?

But he trusted his training, his instincts, and his skill.

Ichaival warmed in his hand. Loki.

Yeah. He trusted Loki's protection magic and his now as well.
Did he ever properly thank him for the bow? He couldn't think if he did. He couldn't remember.

He pushed the thought from his head.

One.

Two.

Go.

Clint burst through the heavy, titanium door as a blur, Ichaival zipping through the air in his bow-hand as a violent, magenta streak.

Clint didn't hardly need a split second to survey the rest of the containment room as he tumbled behind a crate left behind from when Fancy Pants and the Hulk played 'catch me if you can.'

The room was a sight, but he wasn't too late.

The scepter still stood, locked in its bullet...well 'almost anything proof' containment case in the center of the room.

It gave him the the heebie-jeebies still.

The blue youki which had previously swirled around the entire room in some sort of surreal, whirlpool, now spiked and ebbed completely unstable. Just like back when Sesshomaru fired Bakusaiga at the Chitauri over New York, the hair on the back of his neck pricked up.

This wasn't a good sign. If the youki surrounding the scepter completely dispersed the call of the scepter would certainly due them in.

The absolute last thing Clint wanted was to be a puppet to Thanos again. He had to end this NOW and re-stabilize the youki perimeter.

Nebula stood on the far-left side of the room, typing into the control console, her cold black eyes darted immediately up to him. He knew she could cross the room to engage him at a moment's notice.

He really didn't want to engage her close-combat. She went toe-to-toe with Steve after all. He had to keep her at a distance if he were to have a chance.

On the far right, Thor wild eyed, bloody and angry swung Mjolnir at...

Hakudoshi.

Hakudoshi, also on the opposite side of the room as Nebula smugly brandished his polearm, blood slicked down its blade. He appeared to be enjoying slicing up Thor since there wasn't anything the big guy could do about it.

Thor seemed to SEE Hakudoshi, (maybe because of the youki in the room?) but it was clear to Clint Thor couldn't connect any swing with Mjolnir.

Just like back in DC with that Phoenix Demoness.

"Hawk's eye, I can't land a proper hit against this...aggravating child!" Thor thundered and managed to dodge the quicker, but smaller Hakudoshi.
"For the last time, you infernal moron, I am NO child." Hakudoshi's face scrunched up. "Now, listen closely this time, you blundering false-god. We've already won. You see, you've all played into our hands perfectly. I tried to warn that magician, but look what happened to him. And Sesshomaru? Where is your supposed savior? Ah yes, convening with Kagura who has always been a useful distraction. That Demon Lord eventually will fare no better once we use him to obtain the Cosmic Cube, and then I will possess his body. You wouldn't call me child then, would you? No you'd be too dead to call me anything at all!" Hakudoshi taunted and in a blink he was gone and behind Thor.

That was Hakudoshi's plan? To possess Sesshomaru after this was all said and done? Could he do that?

Why was he telling them this? What was with this guy?

Clint had a lot of questions, but unlike Tony, he didn't need the answers to all of them. He still had a shot though. Narrow, but he wasn't called Hawkeye for no reason.

And.

Most importantly.

He couldn't wait to singe the smug head off those creepy, pale shoulders.

His fingers curled around the mystic bowstring of Ichaival and his heart stopped beating. Calm as a frozen lake, solid as a stone, Clint took aim and an arrow, far more expertly formed brighter than before formed in the bow.

It glowed almost pale pink, a blinding white light.

"Geez, you talk too much." Clint muttered as the arrow seared through the youki, leaving an indigo trail of dust as the two merged.

Clint reveled in the wide, shocked eyes of Hakudoshi, jaw ajar.

At the last second Hakudoshi tipped the bolt with his polearm just barely and the arrow veered off course and glanced his left shoulder, searing it black and grey.

"A damned PRIEST?! Never the matter, you're nothing compared to Kikyo's former power. I do find it interesting though, you have that magician's magic active within you. I wonder, Priest, how close you were with him. I bet you're really worked up, you and his brother, the thunder god." Hakudoshi hissed, regaining composure.

"You arrogant runt, stay sharp. You're going to ruin Operation Ultron, and then I'll have to answer to Ronan!" Nebula scathed from across the room, she reached for her weapon, that quarterstaff again before Thor flung Mjolnir her way, forcing her to duck.

"Stay put, foul-tempered robot!" Thor shouted as Mjolnir crunched into the wall, and almost through it. Geez, Tony really did reinforce those walls.

Clint's chest warmed up again as a spike through his sternum. Danger. He ducked immediately. A horrific blast crested over him, unfortunately clipping the tip of his recurve bow, rendering it useless. The incoming fire came from across the room, his eleven o'clock. There he saw four bodies, the rogue agents Polly mentioned.

Who? How...?
The destroyer gun? He probably shouldn't be surprised.

Reflexively, Clint fired back with Ichaival, the violet arrow singing through the unstable youki again.

Another destroyer gun blast hit the arrow and a rippling shockwave of fire and purple magic knocked everyone back.

Clint blinked and narrowed his eyes when he poised himself. Two people stepped out from behind a few crates.

Coulson.

Coulson had Pepper by the hair, tape over her mouth, hands bound in front of her with zipties. Her face red, probably from anger, her cheeks wet as well. Sticky blood caked to the side of her temple which had oozed down over her left ear and neck.

How much had he hurt her? Shock and indignation spiked in his brain.

Then he saw a pair of legs sticking out from behind a crate. Big, probably overweight.

...Happy?!

"I have to hand it to you, Barton, you've always been resilient, a survivalist. I thought for sure the Quinjet would do you in, I suppose I underestimated Loki's devil friend." Clint's mouth went dry.

Coulson.

Coulson led the rebellion against SHIELD. He went rogue. He should have seen it coming, but at the same time...why?! How? When?

"Coulson. Let Pepper go! This is between you and me." Clint bargained as he launched another bolt at Hakudoshi, who this time managed to dodge.

If he and Thor had been engaging the Chitauri and the Leviathans, they could handle a three on two.

This though...Hakudoshi, Nebula, Coulson...these three were far too skilled and Thor couldn't even hit Hakudoshi.

Clint gritted his teeth. He had been through worse. They could make it through this. They had to.

"You and me? This is bigger than just us. Our world is about to be conquered by an intergalactic warlord who has never lost a battle. Our only chance at staving off his invasion is to use his own weapon, the scepter, against him, and stop him from acquiring the Tesseract and completing the Soul stone. Earth's forces aren't strong enough to do this alone. The Avengers' initiative isn't mighty enough for this." Coulson spoke as if he had written a speech he wanted to deliver. Clint processed a few things at once. One, Coulson knew about the Tesseract and the Soul Stone, which made sense, but what didn't make sense was why he would work this hard to work against the Avengers.

Clint couldn't wrap his head around it. How could he betray them like this? Betray Steve Rogers, Captain America?!

"That's crap and you know it, Coulson! You betrayed us. You...I can't believe it. You lost faith in the Avengers and teamed up to kill us! You can't trust these guys! You know the enemy of my
enemy isn't my friend." Clint tumbled behind some crates as Hakudoshi blinked forward and carved one straight in half.

The contents, telescope parts, and other lenses and mirrors, exploded everywhere and the parts that hit the youki sparked and melted. Broken, mirrored glass lay shattered across the floor.

"You're getting distracted, Priest. Remember, what you're fighting for. Oh, and best not bore me too easily, be interesting." Clint cursed as the long spear came sloping down blocking it with Ichaival.

Wait. Blocked.

The violet bow pulsed and Clint used every muscle in his body into parrying the blow.

"How's this for interesting?!" Clint shouted as Ichaival flared a sinister, blinding purple and flung Hakudoshi back across the room like a rag-doll. Hakudoshi hit the wall, as if solid, and fell to the floor, smoking slightly.

Off to the side, Thor and Nebula had begun to square off. Nebula, quicker than Thor, was just able to dodge his backhanded swipe with Mjolnir.

Clint wondered absently if he wasn't calling upon his lightning because he was underground, or the youki chamber, or both.

"Useless, bloodthirsty Devil. You'll never see your little spirit friend again if you can't even kill a brainwashed, exploited SHIELD agent." Coulson fired another cannon shot from the destroyer gun and Clint in the nick of time fired off another magic arrow to nullify it midair.

Spirits friend? This psycho had FRIENDS?!

"The only one being exploited is you! It's not too late to let Pepper go and help us keep the scepter safe. We're stronger than these guys." Clint tried one last time to get Coulson to see reason. As much as he just wanted his revenge...

That's right. Revenge.

A renewed wave of adrenaline shocked through his system. Hakudoshi finally got to his feet, eyes hard.

He wanted pulverize that psycho ghost who sliced up Loki. The bitter taste of adrenaline coated the bottom of his mouth. Right as he was about to launch another shot,

"It's already too late. Thor is strong, sure. But we've already seen… the Aesir aren't quite Gods, are they?" Coulson's voice echoed louder than the destroyer gun did.

Clint knew Coulson just said it to provoke him. Clint KNEW he was baiting him. Everything in his training was shouting not to rise to bite it.

Ichaival pulsed pink at his side.

"Oh, yes, it went according to our plan, we knew all about the Phoenix Demoness thanks to a certain ally of ours." Coulson started Hakudoshi and he rolled his eyes.

"Ally is not a word I would use to describe that glory-hound Mephisto. He betrayed my race to rule them. Once a traitor, always a traitor." Hakudoshi smirked viciously at Coulson and then to Nebula
who groaned and shrugged it off. Did he just call Nebula and Coulson both traitors?

Did Hakudoshi seriously hold a grudge against Mephisto betraying the Demons?

"Loki had it coming. There was no way he would save this world even if he could. He was a coward and a fraud, and most of all weak. He fell to The Other once before and, and brainwashed you all into thinking he wouldn't again." Coulson continued and the skin on Clint's neck and behind his ears burned like the wildfire he just faced in DC.

Pepper screamed something under the tape on her mouth.

Ichaival practically rumbled next to him and he pursed his lips. He'd just have to trust his instincts that Ichaival would fire and work against normal humans, not just Hakudoshi.

Because he really wanted to shut Coulson up.

Coulson framed him for being the mole.

Coulson tried to blow him and Sesshomaru up in the Quinjet, possibly trying to kill Dr. Selvig as well, though Thor got to them in time.

But, selfishly, that all took a back seat to him talking shit about Loki.

He had no right. He didn't know him. Loki was the only reason there weren't casualties.

He was the smartest man he knew, Tony be damned. He knew their enemy and survived the worst they threw at him. He could stop an entire spaceship from vanquishing an entire city. He could teleport people to other dimensions! He killed an invincible Phoenix Demon! He could also, in the same day be mind-blowingly tender, and selfless, bold and insatiable. Loki could make him laugh, and that wasn't easy. Loki could sway like a predator one minute, and reveal intense vulnerabilities making him like prey the next.

He was amazing.

He was gone.

"How dare you speak ill of my brother! He died protecting Midgard!" Thor boomed and his eyes glowed blue. An eerie blue, it reminded him of when Loki's eyes darkened all black, or when Sesshomaru's eyes bled fully red when he transformed to that dog form.

Lightning began to spark through the room, shorting out some of the lights and the electric interface Nebula had been using.

"Is he even really your brother, Thor? Loki is the reason Thanos is here in the first place." Coulson grimly stated, unperturbed by the lightning. "It was in your report after all. If he hadn't tried to take the throne from Odin, if he hadn't tried to slay the people of Jotunheim, we wouldn't be here. He fell from grace. He told The Other of the Tesseract. He led Thanos here. It's because of him hundreds, maybe thousands of people have died. It is because of him our world is under siege, again. It's because of him I died protecting Earth, not Loki. Loki died protecting nothing, Loki died because he deserved to. Loki was evil." Coulson scathed. Clint's insides ignited hotter than the wildfire he braved earlier that day.

Ichaival's golden hue changed to a brilliant, opalescent white and warmed up like a branding iron in his hand.
Clint locked eyes with Pepper. She was quick and smart as whip. She had to know what he had planned.

If not, he could hit Coulson if she didn't duck anyway.

"You couldn't be any more wrong. He has more honor than I could hope to have." Clint gritted his teeth. He had enough of this traitor telling him where he should have his loyalties. He raised his bow and he swore this time he actually felt a true bowstring taut in his fingers.

And the arrow…the arrow that formed was unlike any other he had formed before. A svelte, spiraled shaft hummed quietly in the bow. A viciously barbed, star shaped arrowhead sparked from the tip and plumes of fiery feathers burned in front of his fingers.

Pepper suddenly ducked and with a smooth exhale, he let the arrow fly.

Coulson fired the destroyer gun again to intercept the magic arrow, however it sliced through the destroyer gun's cannon fire, only veering slightly off course.

The instantaneous look of shock widened Coulson's eyes at the arrow flew nearly true to its mark and sinking itself deep into Coulson's right shoulder, pinning him to the wall behind him.

Clint, however, realized his oversight once he let the vindication settle in his system.

The dazzling, lavender sparks radiating from the arrow had rendered the swirling youki around the scepter to cancel out into indigo dust.

"Yes, the youki interference has weakened enough!" Nebula wheezed, from the corner of the room which Thor had backed her up into. She took a disc from her belt and launched it at the cylindrical case holding the scepter. The disc separated into five separate wedges that encircled the case.

The crunching and cracking of what Tony described as glass 'unbreakable as Sesshomaru's poker face' sharply echoed through the room. It'd take no time for the glass to shatter completely.

Thor pivoted.

Nebula lunged.

Coulson yelled.

Hakudoshi vanished.

The glass shattered.

A familiar, scratching melodic call sang through the air. Instantly the protection spell inlaid in his chest tattoo flared hot.

'Hello Clint, are you ready to achieve true greatness? That cheap, gaudy bow has nothing on my raw power, come, take me and use me for your own desires!'" Nebula announced. He had to get closer to the case, he couldn't allow Nebula or Hakudoshi to get his hands on it. He remembered what the scepter sounded like. He remembered the haunting sensation of being controlled, even by proxy, by the scepter.

In a split instant, before Thor could even take a step or Clint could pivot his bowhand, Hakudoshi blipped in the scepter's space. Even still smoking from his purification blast earlier, he looked
lethal and sharp like the polearm he held.

There was no way he could grab it; he was a ghost! Right?

A shimmering barrier erected itself like a snow-globe, leaving everyone inside save Thor, Nebula, and himself. Clint went to string another purification bow, but Ichaival had cooled off. Inert.

Had he used all the ammunition in it? Was his weapon empty?

Nebula broke into a sprint to get through the barrier and Thor moved to intercept her. With a might heave Mjolnir crashed into the barrier and stayed sparking against the barrier in midair.

"The last thing I need is for you to succumb to its call, Nebula. Come here and let's be off. The sooner you get this wand to that Fantatic Kree, Ronan, so he can beat your meat-headed father, the sooner I can find my Kanna." Hakudoshi lectured as Nebula made it through the Demonic barrier, composing herself. His eyes narrowed and he cursed under his breath as he noticed something.

Clint vaulted forward just in time to see Pepper get into a kneel, picking up the dropped Destroyer gun, hands bloody. Bloody? The glass! Pepper must have cut herself free. And she was within the barrier!

"Get out of my tower!" Pepper snarled, aiming the gun at Nebula.

Clint, with his razor sharp eyesight, saw three things happen at once:

Mjolnir, ringed with jagged lightning, began to indent the spherical barrier.

Nebula, jaw set, lunged for the scepter, dauntless of the destroyer gun.

Coulson, also well within the barrier though still pinned to the wall, reached behind him for his sidearm.

"PEPPER!" Clint shouted from outside the barrier. Just like with Loki, all he could do was watch completely powerless. Clint's chest clenched tight and he tried Ichaival again. Nothing would light.

Rhodes. Jaken. Loki.

The Beretta fired first.

A flash of red puckered out from Pepper's chest. Her eyes caught wide, unfocused. Next, the Destroyer gun clattered heavily to the floor next to Pepper.

Clint's shout caught in his chest just like the bullet in Pepper's.

Pepper.

"Miss Potts!" Clint whipped around and his heart went to his throat. That was Polly's voice. A small blur of white skidded past him.

Rin!

Clint vaulted into a tumble and wrapped Rin into a tight embrace, rolling them across the floor to the edge of the barrier.

"He killed Miss Pepper!" Rin's voice sounded clear enough though muffled into his shirt. "That bandit killed her!" Clint clutched her tighter, and noticed she had crumpled peonies clipped in her
He didn't know if Pepper was dead or not, but agents like Coulson, bleeding out or not, didn't miss much from that distance.

A quiver shook through his chest and he fought a deep sob. Everything was catching up with him. "Get out of here squir-" a static boom sounded through the air. Mjolnir punctured through the youki barrier, disintegrating it. Mjolnir careened towards Nebula, lighting shooting off like stars around it.

Mjolnir struck Nebula square on with a sickening crunch of cybernetics and both shot like a rocket into the wall behind Clint, cratering it. Plaster cracked through the walls and ceiling raining down white powdered dust over all of them.

Ashes to ashes.

'Oh...Sharpshooter, come claim me. I can help you become more powerful than your wildest dreams. You can achieve your destiny of defending yours...and regaining what you lost! With power, anything is possible, even getting back those most important to you.' The scepter's voice cooed in his head, freed from behind the youki barrier Hakudoshi erected...that familiar, haunting echo.

He knew it was all lies.

Clint looked up and Thor had lightning sparking blue and deep in his eyes and white powder across his face and hair. It almost looked like he had somehow evolved, reached a new level of power. Maybe he had.

A thick chain of lightning crooked out and struck the ground near Hakudoshi, snapping and sparking. Hakudoshi's recoiled in pain, face stony in confusion.

Clint spotted something odd, Hakudoshi's feet had dissipated where the lighting snapped at them, much like what had happened to Sesshomaru's mother.

"The scepter will never be yours, small brat. Stand down or will cut your legs out from under you." Thor boomed, approaching the scepter. Hakudoshi frowned and stilled, and Clint swore the Demon Spirit was thinking in overdrive.

"Fine. Go ahead, claim your prize." Hakudoshi spoke evenly, lowering his pole arm smoothly and slowly. Clint breathed a sigh of cautious relief. They did it. They got Hakudoshi to back down.

They weren't too late. They stopped the rogue faction from completing Operation: Ultron.

"This is NO prize. For once and for all, I will destroy this weapon and stop this invasion!" Clint tried to keep Rin's head down as lightning kept fingering across the room and air. Her now white-dusted head kept popping up.

Thor's lightning laced hand opened and crackled with raw energy as the bolts raced up and down the scepter's metal frame. His sure fingers grasped it and a static, high pitched humming struck across the room as pure white, yellow and blue lightning bolts streamed up and down out of the scepter.

It illuminated like a beacon, radiating such a bright light that even Hawkeye had to squint a bit. The double helix of lightning and torrents of scepter energy crackled to the ceiling and floor, shooting...
out like a five pointed star. It bathed everything in an eerie, light yellow energy.

Coulson stilled, and Hakudoshi backed up, polearm out as if it block an attack that hadn't come yet.

'Oh, so you don't want to achieve your full potential? You don't want to save those remaining closest to you and step out of the shadow of these more powerful beings? I'll make you see witness what true power is! Clint's brow furrowed. True power, those were Loki's words under the scepter...The scepter was still talking to him.

No...

At once, all the hair stood on its end on the back of his neck and his triceps. That meant....

The warm, protection magic in his chest surged high. Every instinct inside him was beckoning him to run.

Thor wasn't about to destroy the scepter...

Retreat. FLEE.

He was about to wield it!

Clint's focus had been so foolishly on the scepter waiting for it to combust into blackened shards that he hadn't even looked at what Thor's face had become.

An icy grin had crooked itself upon Thor's rugged features. A grin that Loki wore much better. But it wasn't the grin that chilled Clint's bones.

The whites Thor's fully electric blue eyes returned to normal, but his irises had darkened and hardened into an ominous shade of cerulean. He had seen Thor's eyes this blue before. Clint's gut pitched itself into the top of his throat.

Sesshomaru's scry.

"Chikushou...Thor?" Japanese? The voice came from behind him and he looked back to see Polly standing in the doorway, a glock 30 shaking in her hand. Rin wriggled in his grip and finally poked her head out of his arms.

A crisp, hard bark of laughter sliced through the room and in an instant all the energy vacuumed back into the scepter.

"Polly said Storm God's in trouble!" Rin exclaimed right as Thor swung the scepter slowly and carefully in Polly's direction. She ran forward next to Clint and Rin, raised the glock and clumsily released the safety.

"Thor, it's me. Polly Tanaka, Ice cream girl?! I know you can hear me..." Polly tried to reason, but her arms rose the gun anyway.

"Kare wa anata no iu koto ga kikoenai, baka." Hakudoshi answered for Thor in a thoughtful monotone. Clint wished he had paid closer attention in language training.

Polly shot a dark look towards Hakudoshi and opened her mouth to say something, but stopped when Thor's face darkened.

"No one speaks for me! You and that skinny mortal girl will be the first victims of my glorious destiny." Thor fired the scepter at Hakudoshi and Clint's jaw dropped at the lightning connected
and Hakudoshi fell to the floor, more of his legs dissipating beneath him.

"If you have any sense in your head, mortal girl, you will run." Hakudoshi spat.

Polly pursed her lips and her weapon shook more in her thin arms.

"The devil, no...spirit...said he's fully under control of the scepter... We've all lost...Oh...what have I done? Miss Potts?!" Coulson wretched thick, red blood down his front. Clint studied Coulson quickly. He had never seen this expression on his face before.

Confusion.

Was Coulson subjected to some sort of mind bending from the scepter earlier? Is that why defected?

Shit, was Coulson some sort of puppet as well?

"Polly, run!" Clint shouted desperately, flipping himself onto his feet, letting Rin scramble loose. He willed a small, warm tingle out of Ichaival. The gilded bow hummed with weak, purple energy. Maybe enough for one shot.

"I will silence you!" Thor hollered and before Polly could even look his way, or he even he could line up a shot, a rocket of electric energy collected at the tip of the scepter.

POP.

Polly looked down at her gun in shock. She didn't pull the trigger.

Blood trickled from the left temple of Thor. Thor whipped around to Coulson, who almost took his eye out.

"She's a civilian." Coulson simply said. "I can't let you hurt her."

"I needn't your permission, weak mortal." Thor fluidly arced the scepter back towards Coulson. His movements were so unlike Thor that Clint knew it was true: the Scepter had full control, Thor couldn't even fight it.

The scepter fired once and Coulson's chest cavity erupted with blood, bone and smoke.

"OH MY GOD!" Polly screamed and fired her weapon unintentionally. The shot went wide of Thor and he turned around stonily.

No.

He had to stop Thor.

He lifted Ichaival and forced it to wake up. To feel his desperation, his power. This was his last chance to right everything. He just had to separate the scepter from Thor. That's all.

Dread trickled up his spine as he tried to shove the scry out of his mind.

Clint had Ichaival drawn and slowly but surely a bright purple bolt began to condense and form in the faint bowstring.

"Hawk's Eye, join us or I will end her life." A small spark ignited out of Thor's free hand, hitting Polly's hand. Polly yelped as the glock clattered to the floor.
"Been there, done that, got the scars to prove it. Do you think this is what Loki would want, Thor? I know you can hear me. You can fight this." Clint had to bide some time...he just had to reach Thor.

Thor hesitated.

"Thor, you're stronger than this. You're the God of Thunder! You're the big older brother of a God of Chaos, and by proxy a Demon Lord. This has got to be easy compared to this." Clint stole a quick peek down at Ichaival. It had almost gotten back to fully charged.

Pause.

"They said they were no brothers of mine!" Thor roared and horizontally lashed out with the scepter. A battery of golden shots all shot towards her, one clipping her in the side sending her to the floor.

"Polly-chan!" Rin screamed, eyes pinpricks. Her white hair and flowers in her hair, along with her white dress even made her look like a ghost.

Hakudoshi turned his attention to Rin, but didn't say or do anything. Just stared blankly.

Polly's body smoked on the floor just like Nat's had in the scry. He didn't know if she was dead or simply unconscious.

No...no...this was all wrong. Since when was he fighting with the intruders and against an Avenger?! Tony sent them here to defend his home, so he had to stop this. Why couldn't he have been in time to save Loki?! This is the last thing Loki would have wanted, Thor to be under the scepter's control.

Val hummed. One last shot.

POP!

The sudden gunshot shocked Clint so much he would have jumped if it wasn't for his training. He side eyed Rin, covered in white dust, holding the glock.

"Please give us Storm God back." Rin sobbed. Oh yeah. Nat had trained her to shoot one didn't she?

The bullet hit Thor directly in the upper chest, but Thor merely looked at it amused.

"Little mortal whelp, that was quite foolish. You have incurred the wrath of the heir of Asgard. Prepare for death." Thor warned glacially. It was Thor's voice alright, but it didn't sound like Thor at all. The arrow finished forming in Ichaival. FINALLY.

He directed the scepter in Rin's direction.

NO. He failed Polly, Pepper, Loki, Jaken, Rhodes. He wouldn't fail Squirt.

"Her name is Rin, and you're not killing anyone else." Clint let the luminescent arrow fly. The arrow sang through the air, but was swatted out of the sky with a wave of the golden scepter.

"So, you too yearn for death, Hawks-eye? Sorry to say, but our Lord the Mad Titan has plans for us. If we cannot turn Son of Taisho then you'd be a most suitable opponent for him. With proper enhancements, you could purify the last living Demon! I wonder how irate and irrational he will be, once I slay his daughter..." Thor's voice bellowed and a wave of fear and wrath shook Clint to
the core. Him turned to purify Sesshomaru? Kill Rin just to piss off a Demon Lord? This Mad Titan was really off his rocker.

Another crook of lightning infused energy flooded out of the scepter right at Rin.

Clint dove through the air like he had springs in his feet. He had to get Rin down! Clint braced himself for the shot to either hit him or Rin.

Pause.

Nothing.

He twisted his head and saw Hakudoshi planted in front of Rin, youki barrier up in full force. Hakudoshi's face had twisted into a reddened rage and he set his jaw hard. His youki spiked around him and the barrier gleamed stronger than ever crackling with the energy blow it absorbed. Clint would say it was an odd display of heroism if it was anyone but Hakudoshi doing it.

Hakudoshi was heavily leaning on his Polearm, but other than that looked strong as ever.

"No one hurts Kanna." Hakudoshi pointed his polearm at Thor. "Especially not another dull puppet of another arrogant Lord." Hakudoshi's barrier redirected the energy from the blow back at Thor, sending him careening back into the wall with a sick smack.

"Kagura's friend? Is she your friend too? But, I'm not Kanna!" Rin protested, but Hakudoshi ignored her.

Clint had no idea what was going on in Hakudoshi's head, but if he was willing to protect Rin, that's all that mattered to him.

Clint heard a crumbling sound from behind him and Nebula, sparking chest cavity and an arm missing, staggered from the wall she had been punched through.

"I will get that scepter from that overcharged battery if it's the last thing I do. Thanos WILL die by my hands." Nebula hissed with pain, cybernetics sparking and short circuiting across her body.

He had to admire her tenacity. It kinda reminded him of Loki. He wondered what she went through as a daughter of Thanos. Didn't look like a picnic.

He spotted the control panel on the far side of the room. Jarvis.

He couldn't believe he was about to do this. He couldn't believe he was about to do exactly what Coulson did.

Enemy of my enemy is my friend...but his enemy was also a friend.

He was really in way over his head.

His other choices, though, left him in a body bag, and Thor taking the scepter back to Thanos to fight alongside him.

"Hey, Terminator, if you want that scepter so bad, get to that console and undo whatever hack you infected Jarvis with and reactivate it. Tony's defense systems will definitely slow the big man down. I'll keep him busy." Clint ordered and committed. Nebula gave him an odd look then scowled.

"Do you really think you can fight a battle on two fronts in your condition, Nebula? I'd do as he
"Hakudoshi... the voice of reason?!
"You'll get your revenge soon enough."

"It will take some time to de-sync the systems. You're crazy if you think you can take on an Aesir in one on one combat, Terran Priest." Nebula berated, and this time Clint was confused. It almost sounded like a warning.

"I got some aces up my sleeve." He didn't. "Just activate Jarvis, and Casper," he directed at Hakudoshi, "keep her safe." Clint willed Ichaival to activate. He poured his concentration into the bow until it glowed again. This time the light was a deep violet.

"My spiritual form is losing its grip on this dimension thanks to you, I'll have to get creative and borrow something." Hakudoshi grimaced and Clint didn't stick around to figure out what that meant.

Thor had roused himself from the wall.

"Hey big guy, let's spar! Loki taught me a few things." Clint fired up another bolt and shot it right between Thor's unnaturally blue eyes.

Thor dodged and engaged with vigor.

Clint almost immediately regretted his plan. If you could even call it a plan. Thor swung the scepter with a lot more force and speed than Clint counted on. He barely had time to parry or block the blows with Ichaival, much less attack back.

He could sense his strength waning. It'd only be a matter of time before his body gave out or...

Thor knocked Ichaival from Clint's sweat slicked grip and with a front kick knocked the wind out Clint. Clint flew through the air, landing hard on his back.

A sharp flare of pain erupted... definitely broke a few ribs. Until then, the adrenaline kicking through his system made him ignore the previously cracked ribs he got from the harsh landing he had with Rhodes. Now each breath stabbed with pain. Clint wheezed and got to his knees just in time to for to take the tip of the scepter to his chest.

"Time to answer his call once more, Hawk's-eye!" Thor's face broke into a crooked grin. Clint cursed his luck, he just had to fail again. Loki would be so disappointed in him.

The scepter beamed bright blue and the point dug into his chest.

Clint's breath caught and his chest erupted in a fiery heat. That was it! Loki's protection spell!

Clint's chest glowed green from under his Kevlar and in a shock of runes, the scepter repelled from his chest like the same ends magnet.

"You're not turning me. I will never stand by you again. I'm an Avenger first and foremost, and I will Avenge Loki." Clint staggered to a standing position, undaunted.

"What trickery... if you will not stand beside me, Hawk's-eye you shall not stand at all!" Thor swooped the scepter back.

"Uncle Clint, no!" Don't look Rin. Clint couldn't close his eyes. Ichaival was too far away across the floor. He reached behind himself and grabbed an explosive arrow. If Thor swung at him then at least he could damage him with the resulting blast.
"My turn. If you're the best Priest you humans have to offer, you're all surely doomed for eradication." That was Polly's voice. Clint's eyes shot wide.

Polly stood straight, and in perfect form had Hakudoshi's polearm out in attack stance, the scepter blocking it.

"You had your pathetic attempt; it's time for my fun." Polly showed all her teeth...except it obviously wasn't her. Hakudoshi had definitely possessed her or something. "Remember me, Thunder God? Our duel was cut short and I wish to continue it." Clint didn't really know what to say about this. Did Hakudoshi, on his own volition, save him?

"We are definitely going to have to talk about what you mean by borrow... Nebula, status report!" Clint winced heavy getting to his feet, his ribs burst in raw, throbbing pain. He limped to get Ichaival, which had grown cold and inert in his grip. Spent.

"This is not a simple task, Terran Priest! Give me two more clicks." Nebula typed furiously across the panel with her one good hand. Clint made his move to Ichaival with a couple hobbled steps.

Polly's face flushed purple in exertion as the deadlock broke in a stalemate. With a fluid, well-practiced jab she thrust the polearm, catching Thor in the inside of the arm. Blood sprayed and Thor cursed in a language Clint didn't recognize.

"Ahaha! Even though this human body reduces my power to that of a Hanyou, I finally can taste the blood! How spicy! How vibrant the battle feels. I feel so ALIVE!" Polly cackled with glee, eyes bright and teeth gleaming. Clint knew he should really, really be against this, but at the moment he had no idea how to convince Hakudoshi to stop possessing Polly who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

He could probably try to use Val to make him come out, but then Thor would just kill them all and take off the scepter. A chill went up his spine. Yet again, he found himself in way over his head.

"I've had enough of your games! I am the heir of Asgard and I have far higher goals to reach than to spar with you mortals." Thor reached out with the hand not holding the scepter and Clint heard the crumble and rumble of drywall and metal before he saw it.

How could they be so stupid?!

Mjolnir and the scepter. He was going to hit Polly with a pincer attack.

With every last ounce of energy and coordination he could muster he simultaneously threw his exploding arrow at Thor's hand holding the scepter, and then threw himself between Mjolnir's path and Polly in an attempt to block the hurtling hammer. Clint set Ichaival out horizontally in front of him as Mjolnir thrummed through the air.

Clint set himself and prayed to any god that would hear him that he'd survive this stupid act of heroism.

He heard the explosion and the concussion of the blast pushed him forward.

Mjolnir collided with Ichaival with a mighty tang of metal and a shockwave of magic. Clint's left wrist and left arm, already weakened from the fall, immediately broke and Mjolnir's trajectory barely deflected as it struck him full on in the left side of his chest.
Stars.
Stars and inky black blobs.
Lava. Magma hot pain.

A splintering, shattering pain erupted across Clint's nervous system. Clint cried out in terrific agony as black and white spots sparked into his faded vision. He felt like the entire left side of his body had been crushed by an industrial vice.

Time slowed down as Clint hit the deck. Ichaival clanged to the floor by his side, dull and tarnished. Clint sputtered out blood and his head lolled to the side to see the lights and Jarvis' defense systems go back online. Warped voices clamored in his head and he couldn't breathe.

So. This was death. Huh. At least they got Jarvis back online. At least Rin was safe. He wasn't too little too late. He made a difference.

He could be with Loki. Nate. Pietro.

Except...

Why all of the sudden did he feel so sad?

Something forced Clint's jaw up. A hand.

Rin. She had tears in her eyes and was mouthing something. Despite his extensive SHIELD training of lip-reading, his vision had dimmed too much and he could only make out 'Sesshomaru-sama...fix'

Clint burbled on his own teeth and blood and despite how ridiculous it sounded, it warmed him that even still Rin believed that her father could make everything right. Tears slipped from his eyes.

Loki's vibrant green eyes, his cackling, hot laugh, the sway of his hips, the brush of his fingertips...he listened to his music, he loved him, a mortal! Loki wanted to know everything about him, wanted to open him up, yet was so patient, which, really...Loki patient?

Did he really ever look deeper into Loki? Did he ever get underneath all those layers? Those centuries that made Loki, Loki? Did Loki get loved as much by him, as he was loved by Loki? Was he too selfish? Was he stuck in too much awe of being loved by a God to see him as Loki?

It had been so long since he had felt such a deep stab of regret. Maybe he hadn't...

He should have said those words. Those three little words.

He should have told Loki he loved him, and that he wasn't alone anymore.

He'd never get the chance.

Loki never got to hear the truth.

A sob, a knot of a deeper, darker pain lodged in his gut as he let himself close his eyes. The opening of 'Pinocchio Story' a song on 808s & Heartbreaks that was a bit underrated, beat in his head

'You'll never figure out real love
Never figure out real love
You'll never figure out real love'

And with that, Clint graveyard spiraled into the lonely abyss of death.

Chapter End Notes

Hi all! I hope you haven't given up on this fic. I have been though a lot in the past six months. I lost my father and a close friend suddenly and tragically to heart attacks and have been finally treating my depression that snuck up on me. This fic became simply too stressful to work on. I tried really hard to get this chapter out as soon as I could, and I hope you are happy (or at least satisfied with it). There may be some odd spelling or grammar errors here and there, but i wanted to make sure it got out as soon as it could. I made it extra long for our poor, poor Clint.

Next chapter will be Sesshomaru's what happened to him, and what will happen to our remaining Avengers next!

Thank you all for your consistent encouragement. You all make my day and please let me know what you think of this chapter with a comment.

-TL
Sesshomaru and the Empire Strikes Back

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sesshomaru had been instructed from a young age to lean into pain. Freedom from all pain was illusory and those who chased a life of comfort were brittle of body and fragile of mind. Sesshomaru had never cowed or bent beneath the will of an enemy or any duress.

Yet, every Demon had a limit.

Sesshomaru pushed the inconceivable notion he had limits out of his head as the magic manacles plunged him through the clear sky towards the cold, salty sea.

Forty nine minutes ago.

Sesshomaru planted himself, stone still, upon the seawall of the impressively massive military base of Norfolk Virginia. He had long ago had ascertained the whereabouts of the vessels that supported the base:

Carrier Strike Group Two, which stationed itself a few hundred kilometers out into the sea. Her flagship carrier, USS Bush CVN 77, commanded the Destroyer Squadron 22. This squadron was comprised of three destroyer vessels and was further supplemented by three additional destroyers and a light cruiser. Each of these vessels had assigned to it their own Strike Fighter Squadron.

Carrier Strike Group Eight, similarly stationed except further south, has her flagship carrier as the USS Truman CVN 75 and commanded Destroyer Squadron 28. This squadron again consisted of three destroyer vessels and one light missile cruiser.

From what Sesshomaru could deduce, the smaller vessels defended the flagship carrier and the flagship flexed the offensive muscle when needed.

Romanoff also informed him three other vessels vigilantly patrolled under the surface of the water. These submarines could attack from the stealth of deep waters. Useful.

He tested their stealth abilities by reaching into the sea with his hand, and pulsing out his youki as far as he could. And while he could sense them, they were in fact, much more adept at hiding their positions and current velocity and trajectory than Sea Serpents he had killed years ago.

Jets, all of various design, circled in formations over him, their shrieks and thunder peeled across the grey sky, awaiting further orders.

"No one has ever sunk a modern-day aircraft carrier. However, that is because when in open sea they're incredibly difficult to locate with our intelligence and counter-measures. Subs, Go-Fast boats, Cruise Missiles, all fail because we have either manage to prevent them from getting into attack formation or in range. This sort of battle is another different animal altogether. They'll have to rely solely on counter measures like noise makers which probably will prove themselves ineffective against magic, and operating in strict formation to stay operational." Romanoff's
suggestion did not go over Sesshomaru's head.

"I see. You wish for me to use my prowess to act as an interceptor to defend the vessels so their artillery may bring down the Nycteus." Sesshomaru pondered this suggestion as they both stared out to the horizon, waiting for the smoking, fireball to thunder finally towards their doorstep.

"Yep. Commander McDaniel of Norfolk wouldn't dream of insinuating the Carrier Strike Groups need the extra defense support in front of his own advisers and subordinates, but he may have mentioned it to Fury. Not only have these strike groups have never gone up against something like a space cruiser, but they've never had to defend against an attack on Norfolk Naval Station like this either." Romanoff concluded and Sesshomaru could smell the slightest whiff of uneasiness waft off her.

"Plus, as Loki and you pointed out, we know the enemy is already aiming to capture you, if you were to expend most of your energy distracting them, SHIELD and the United States can do what they do best and knock the enemy craft out of the sky." Romanoff explained, squaring up to him and Sesshomaru searched her impassive face.

The leader of the military garrison Captain McDaniel, had proven himself steely, if a bit young. His preparedness showed in what Sesshomaru could approve of a fine enough strategy of the defense of this military station.

"Additionally, Tony giving the Helicarrier your youki capsules to install in their tomahawk missiles should be enough to bring their shields down. So you don't have to worry about a repeat of the scepter room with your Hufflepuff bro, Steve." Romanoff chided. So. She knew about that incident. Reluctantly he admitted she was indeed was correct about her points, though Sesshomaru knew that was not the only reason she relayed this strategy to him.

She knew about the curse, along with Stark and Rogers. She surmised that despite his intense training, that he would not be of much assistance offensively and was saving him face from revealing this to their allies and enemies.

Sesshomaru didn't respond right away, as the wind rebuffed against his yukata. He had originally wanted to wear his clothes from his time, but the leather jacket proved too confining and he needed his arms covered.

He couldn't reveal to Stark and the others that the markings on his left wrists and triceps had changed from red to blue. Stark interpreted this as him spurning him, and pushing him away.

Perhaps that was accurate, yet Stark shouldn't have taken it so personally. Sesshomaru wanted nothing more than to prove to Stark he had nothing to fear, but in the end, Stark had only become more cagey and anxious.

Sesshomaru would prove here that he had things under control, that he could be relied upon.

As much as he outwardly projected confidence, he couldn't shake this foreboding intuition, his Demon instincts screamed at him that there was something off about this whole battle. That they overlooked some tactic, that they didn't prepare adequately for some angle.

He also, couldn't shake the assumption in similarity between the Aethon and the Nycteus: if both ships would operate the same.

"I will allow your human vessels to attempt with their own might to bring down the Nycteus." Sesshomaru paused, and then continued. "The premise that the Nycteus and the Aethon are in fact
identical cruisers should be tested." Sesshomaru locked eyes with Romanoff and her lips hardened and thinned.

"Do you have anything solid to back this theory up?" Romanoff asked again, edging for something hard that he couldn't give her. Sesshomaru almost sighed. Romanoff and Loki had become close and him challenging Loki's knowledge of the ships would most certainly be scrutinized by her.

He didn't want to tell her anything explicit until what he had Stark had theorized had been confirmed:

That the Nycteus was stalling in space for a reason. The Nycteus intended to take down their realm's communication array: their satellites. He informed Stark and the rest of his friends their enemy would attempt this back at the War Assembly.

Stark's D.E.M.O.N.S. was launched into what Stark had communicated to him was one of the highest orbits for humans' satellites: 200,000 kilometers. Most of the humans' communication satellites orbited at a much lower altitude, such as 36,000 kilometers.

Stark had anticipated that one of the cruisers would disrupt the lower orbit communications array, far below D.E.M.O.N.S., when it wasn't the Aethon, which had already arrived in the capital of the province, the Nycteus remained.

And Stark was ready.

"Loki at the dinner told Rin the story of Keiji and Kado, two twin Panther Demon brothers. By all accounts they were raised the same, with the same trainer and treated fairly by their father. Yet, Keiji was by all accounts superior in swordplay and endurance, while Kado excelled at strategy and youki attacks. In addition, that film, Star Wars, had identical cruisers with different commanders, yet they operated entirely differently." Sesshomaru wasn't sure why he remembered this particular story before, but he knew that Romanoff had overheard it because she rarely missed anything.

"Demons are living creatures. They are born just like humans; these are ships that were constructed for a purpose. Also, according to Loki, they look and operate almost identically." Romanoff countered and Sesshomaru's chest hitched minutely. He wasn't born, he was constructed for a purpose.

Different purposes in mind by his mother and father, yes, but purposes nonetheless.

"Yet, they chose the Aethon to conduct the initial attack on Shanghai for a reason. I'll keep it in mind when I'm in the air." Romanoff continued and gestured to the Quinjet which had finished preparations. Banner stood beside it, standing tall though Sesshomaru could smell his anxiety from far off.

"Conduct yourself as you see fit." Sesshomaru turned from Romanoff without a hint of emotion.

"Good luck to you too, Pretty Boy. Don't fret, Helicarrier Two will provide ample cover fire and Helicarrier Three is still en-route to DC from Hong Kong and should be there in an hour." Romanoff informed before she strode off to the Quinjet.

He eyed the Quinjet and recalled how fragile the vessel was. The bomb that combusted the Quinjet he had piloted wasn't overly powerful. If he left Romanoff to her own devices, would she be able to prevail against the forces to come in such a flimsy craft? Perhaps, he would have to assist her as well. He wasn't against it, but he debated how much it would distract him from his task of showing
the enemy he was not to be trifled with.

D.E.M.O.N.S. had long ago pinged his youki senses to the arrival of the Aethon, which now currently stalled over the Provincial capital of Washington DC, and he now just felt the ping of the Nycteus. The pings jarred him quite differently. He was now sure of it. The two cruisers were indeed more dissimilar than he was led to believe.

Bakusaiga trilled in glee next to him, while Tenseiga pulsed in warning.

Yes, he had made some progress in his tireless training.

Yes, he had gotten far stronger and learned much since first arriving in this realm.

Yes, he knew his enemy and stood amongst countless, unanticipated allies on this battlefield.

Yet, would it all be enough?

Yes. It had to be.

PING

Thanks to D.E.M.O.N.S., Sesshomaru had clocked that the Nycteus had stalled at the edge of the Earth's air and the cosmos. He closed his eyes and focused on the few youki blips across the Province: his own in Stark's youki reactor, and Jaken's. They couldn't communicate explicitly through the link, but they could read the other's youki levels, just he could track Loki's magic.

He spiked his youki twice, a code he and Stark created. Stark responded with spiking his back as well, presumably through his arc reactor. Jaken flashed his too and Sesshomaru sensed him transform.

Once Jaken had undergone his training to hone his true form, he could be sufficiently deadly when provided a fresh water source.

A dark uneasiness crept into Sesshomaru psyche. He trusted Stark would be able to thwart the technological attack on the communication satellites. He had faith in Loki's mind to strategies, and he trusted in Thor's dedication and might…

So why Sesshomaru's talons twitch?

"The Nycteus has entered the lower thermosphere." Sesshomaru's earpiece cut out suddenly into white static. Immediately after, a flash of wicked violet light flashed across high above them and backlit the cloudy sky. Sesshomaru heard silence right before a clamor of humans. The Nycteus had severed their long-distance communication satellite array.

It was Stark's brilliant idea to implement a 'honeypot' into the technological systems of the satellites to lure and entrap the enemy and figure out how they could infect their communications array. It would take the enemy quite some time to pinpoint and destroy each satellite. Due to this, Stark theorized they would somehow try to create a chain reaction through one of SHIELDS' own surveillance satellites, and one of the traitors would assist in hacking it to bring down the others. Stark, however, would intercept this attack with the honeypot, and the attack would be for naught.

So why did their communications falter anyway?

The entirety of the overcast sky alit in a sinister violet shade, quite similar to his former nemesis Naraku. And just then, above the fray, the sirens, the powering up of artillery and armaments, he
heard her.

His ears pricked up noticeably.

"Yo, Sesshomaru, long time, no see." Her voice carried on the wind just as if she stood right beside him.

"Kagura. Show yourself." Sesshomaru stated simply to the sky, Bakusaiga's energy curling around his grasp on her hilt. Kagura would have answers. He tugged on Bakusaiga's hilt to free her of her sheath. He ignored the jagged pain webbing own his arm as Bakusaiga sluggishly scraped out of her sheath. He couldn't wield her as expertly as he wished, she felt as if she weighed an entire mountain, but he would take any improvement. He painstakingly pointed the tip of her sharp blade at the overcast sky, precisely where a mixture of Loki's corrupted magic flowed.

Far off, another pulse of purple energy and Sesshomaru's youki spiked in warning. The Nycteus fired her initial attack volley.

"I'll show myself when I'm damn good and ready. I'm the wind, truly free, that means free from doing what you say as well." Kagura's voice was almost drowned out by a high-pitched shrieks as purple light flooded the sky above their current position. Sesshomaru leapt high in the air, Bakusaiga countering the violet in the sky with her own, fierce green energy. Above the low cloud cover, Sesshomaru could calculate that a hundred violet projectiles would shower their fleet with magicked cannon fire. Without proper maneuverability, their initial casualties would be lamentable. This was what Romanoff had spoken of, only he had the maneuverability to save their fleet.

Just as he predicted, the projectiles careened through the cloud cover like Inuyasha's Diamond Spear Blast from Tessaiga. They would surely lay waste to the Carrier Strike Groups if even half of them got past him.

As if he would allow the dishonor of enemy to draw first blood.

With a quick calculation, he determined the optimal trajectory to either deflect, block or annihilate most of the incoming barrage. Bracing for the pain in his arm to arc across his entire body, Bakusaiga's youki exploded through her blade. Sesshomaru tore her through the sky around him in a horizontal, sweeping arcs that spanned like circles. He repeated these arcs tirelessly, each one just as swift as the first.

The multiple concentric circles of Bakusaiga's decomposition youki would neutralize most, if not all the initial volley of cannon fire. Sesshomaru descended rapidly towards the bow of the helicarrier just as it unleashed a wave of countermeasures to counteract a swath of the initial barrage as well.

As he landed on the bow, chest heaving in exertion, the sky erupted loudly in popping explosions of acid green, deep violet and fiery orange.

Still some magic cannon fire eked through his and the helicarrier's counterattack. He ignored the pulsing, hot pain in his left side as he lunged low and leapt again. He swiped through the air in careful strokes to avoid the launching jets. He successfully intercepted the remaining violet cannon fire that would sink one of the destroyers of the Eighth Carrier Strike Group.

Sesshomaru panted, winded, bangs sticking to his forehead with a sheen of sweat.

His attack with Bakusaiga had taken more effort than he really anticipated. He had to focus all his efforts on melding his own youki with hers. It hadn't been this taxing in training!
His stamina, typically unmatched by any enemy, was indeed being negatively impacted by the curse put upon him.

Sesshomaru watched as a singular blast from the Nycteus blew through his attack and brushed the stern one of the destroyers of the 8th carrier strike group. The ship rocked and some smoke emitted from the vessel, but remained afloat.

Shrieks of jets taking off by him didn't drown out a condescending tut from a certain Wind Witch.

"Wasn't perfect, though impressive for someone who's cursed by the most obsessive magic freak show I've seen in a long time." Kagura's trademark laughter rang through the air.

Another voice ribboned through his head, not loudly, hardly more than a distant murmur.

'I see you, Demon Eternal, the one who can walk the Astral Plane. You'll fall in line soon enough, and I think you'll see why.' Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed to the smallest degree. The object of his failed scry, The Other presumptuously thought he could not only predict his behavior, but expect him to obey him? If Loki didn't already state his absolute intention on torturing him viciously, he would take it upon himself to do so.

"Kagura, your flattery rings false." Sesshomaru scathed. The Nycteus advanced closer, Sesshomaru could feel the vessel descend, getting into optimal attack position. His youki instincts spiked high. Something ominous was about to transpire. Something told him to find cover, to bolt to higher ground.

"Not everything I say is a lie, you know." Kagura drawled, a hair annoyed.

"Indeed." Sesshomaru answered. In response, a most unusual attack then occurred.

"… did you just say something sarcastic? The humans have definitely rubbed off on you, that's for sure." A heatwave rolled through the air like a furnace, and almost immediately the cloud cover lifted as if Storm Demons had willed them away.

The tranquil blue of the sky stood in direct contrast to the reality of the battle.

"Yeesh, Gamora is really showing off now. My new superiors are more narcissistic than Naraku, and we both know that's saying something." Kagura's voice flirted through his ears. She wanted to remain at a distance still and that was fine by him. He could seek her counsel after they dealt with this foe.

Through the clouds, just around a kilometer above them, hovered the Nycteus. Its shadow cast down upon them like a transformed Wolf Demon about to pounce on his prey. If Sesshomaru were a lesser Demon, he would have taken a step back.

Why was he randomly reminded of his father in his true form?

To his left and right, hatches opened on the helicarrier. He knew what would occur next. His own youki would be launched from the helicarrier on which he stood. He stood fast refusing to cede his mind to his blind impulses beckoning him to flee.

Three thin, agile missiles trusted upward from the deck of the helicarrier. They appeared to be no more than the typical missile which would simply strike the shield of the Nycteus and be ineffective.

However, he could feel his own youki thrumming in little pods within the missiles.
The Nycteus made no move to intercept the three missiles as they streamed seamlessly up through the now clear sky. Logically, the Nycteus wouldn't need to launch a counter-offensive if they thought the missiles would prove useless.

The three missiles careened straight on into the underside of the hull of the Nycteus, and Sesshomaru nearly quirked a smirk as the previously impenetrable shield surrounding the Nycteus eroded partially back. The indigo dust from his ice blue youki and the violet shield shimmered down upon the sea. While the missiles only revealed a small portion of the port side of the Nycteus' hull, it was enough.

"Oh….so THAT's your plan. It's clever, but Sesshomaru, but I don't think that's gonna do the trick."
Kagura warned and as if on cue, The Other's voice rippled through his head once more.

'Don't think for a moment you've gotten the upper-hand, Demon Eternal. You're going to witness first hand the first lost battle of this pathetic planet. After this you will lead us to the remaining half of the Soul Gem.' The Other's voice snaked through his mind. Is this what Loki had heard regularly? How grating.

Synchronized, the destroyer and cruiser vessels from both Carrier Strike Groups Two and Eight trained their artillery at the gap in the shield of the Nycteus.

He even spotted Romanoff's Quinjet stream by, Banner in his true form, clutching its windscreen. Baffling.

The various squadrons of assorted jets also double backed and locked in formation. At least fifty screaming, blazing missiles hurtled upwards from the ships, not even taking into account the ones fired from the helicarrier on which he stood, and the jets in tight attack formations high above him.

Sesshomaru's eyes widened a fraction and his ears pinned themselves against his head as the counterattack rattled every bone and nerve ending in his body. Intimidation. Caution. Unease. Competition.

Tenseiga shivered in his sheath. Odd.

Sesshomaru frowned slightly, did Tenseiga fear, as Loki did, that if his true nature was revealed that they would covet him? The humans would turn their missiles against him and make him relinquish Tenseiga to them? No. Tenseiga had the upmost faith in his abilities and the humans. There was no way he would fear being taken by them...

Tenseiga hummed in agreement.

Then what was Tenseiga's trepidation about?

Sesshomaru couldn't pay Tenseiga any more mind as thunderous explosions boomed through the air like boulders rolling down a cliff-side. The continuous vibrations of the missiles striking the Nycteus' hull rocked through the sky. Even the surface of the ocean below him pulsed from the impact.

Crimson fires burst forth from the hull, and in response a swarm of chariots sped out of the main ports on the sides of the ship. Those were just distractions though. The Nycteus would charge its cannons again and fire another volley of countless magic blasts at their navy.

He'd have to utilize Bakusaiga's corrosive youki to get one solid strike through the gap in the shield, just like the other vessels had.
Sesshomaru clinched his jaw and his eyes bled slightly as a jagged jolt of pain erupted from his left arm. His left arm spasmed and his talons extended and retracted.

Tenseiga flared to life at his side, desperately trying to assuage the pain.

He didn't need Tenseiga's aid.

A Demon Lord like himself could withstand the pain, would embrace it, allow it keep him sharp. Aware. This pain that coursed through his body down to his right arm he'd endure just like any other.

Slowly, he brought Bakusaiga's blade up to chest level, his right arm rigid in agony.

"Sesshomaru, you don't get it, do you? The closer that sorcerer gets, the stronger his control on you. It's the same with any spirit he rips from the underworld." Kagura's voice lilted by him. "Just like Naraku had my heart, he has your blood." Kagura stated flippantly, almost amused.

The Other controlled his blood?

Oh, then that would explain why he currently couldn't transform, and why his markings changed color on his left arm. It also explained why when the Aethon and Nycteus approached, his link to Bakusaiga had weakened. She had come from his body, the very arm that the Other had carved his name into.

Perhaps it was why his bond was breaking with her.

"Kagura, why do you seek this Sesshomaru out?" Sesshomaru finally asked the wind, studying the Nycteus as it glowed a cool violet hue. No doubt the Nycteus was preparing for another attack.

"Why wouldn't I? I got brought back from the Demonic Underworld and who do I have to interact with? That savage, Hakudoshi, a delusional Fire Demon, and some angry alien chick the same color as Jaken. Pass. Besides, I got a deal to cut with you." Kagura snorted and he could picture her exact expression even though he was only looking at the wind.

"I think not." Sesshomaru's gaze sharpened as he painstakenly pulsed youki into Bakusaiga, the tip of her blade glowing her signature jade green.

His joints began to stiffen and his breath stilled dead in his lungs. Even his vision began to darken at the edges. Was Kagura right? Did The Other have control over his blood, prohibiting it from circulating?

Was the effect now amplified because he was engaging directly with the Nycteus?

It didn't matter, he was taught from a young age to withstand any amount of pain, any torture for the main goal of destruction. Taking down those who threatened him. Protecting what belonged to him and who mattered.

Sesshomaru's fangs lengthened and his ice blue youki spiked around him on the deck of the Helicarrier. Bakusaiga trembled in his grasp as his knees threatened to buckle from the acidic pain clenching his muscles. Sesshomaru fought wincing visibly from the boiling pain coursing through his veins as Bakusaiga powered up her youki, beginning her primary attack they had practiced countless times.

"Die." Snapping green youki forked from the tip of Bakusaiga towards the gap in the shield. Like an impossibly heavy pendulum, the tip of Bakusaiga's blade flung down and hit the deck of the
helicarrier.

He couldn't lift her back up, he'd have to rest momentarily.

The twin beams of youki zipped true towards the gap until the last minute when both snaked wide, instead hitting two useless chitauri vessels. The commander of the Nycteus was using the Chitauri to intercept his attacks! They'd surely do the same against the rest of the fleet as well. They'd have to exhaust their entire aerial force or they'd deplete their entire artillery.

It was then giant Cetaceans, like whale Demons, charged out of the ports as well, brutishly bowling over agile jets.

Sesshomaru watched as the Chitauri began to from their own ranks and fire upon some of their own jets causing disrupt their formations.

The situation had just taken a steep turn in the enemy's favor.

'And as you see, Demon Eternal, we will win this war.' The Other's voice echoed in his head.

"Sesshomaru, you and your human friends can't win like this. Think of it like a trade, my help for your help." Kagura finally materialized next to him. He paused for the briefest of seconds because she looked exactly the same, from the feathers in her sleek hair, to her blood red eyes, down to her calloused bare feet.

She thus far looked the most material of all the spirits he had seen, including Hakudoshi on the screen.

Kagura's smirk unexpectedly calmed him. Since arriving in this time, the only remnants of Demons from his time were not ones he would ever associate with. If a wayward soul would have asked him a month ago if he would seek out Kagura for company, he would have had their head.

He would never voice the opinion, but it was pleasant to see her here and her usual confident self once more.

"A barter? You are delusional as always Kagura." He had no idea what she could possibly have to barter with.

"Delusional? Well, maybe that makes two of us." Kagura laughed as the underside of the Nycteus began to glow violet from countless ports.

And he'd have to be rea—

A flare of grey and flame caught his attention downward and towards the sea. Two missiles hurtled towards him and the helicarrier from the sea below. Those missiles came from their own fleet! There was no time to avoid the missiles, nor would any countermeasures fire in time.

They'd surely strike the Helicarrrier and ravage it.

Bakusaiga warbled, she wanted to strike again and she lifted herself to aid his weakened arm. Pain lacerated from his legs as he leapt off the edge of the Helicarrier.

The incoming missiles had come from the destroyer in Carrier Group Eight that had been struck by the magic cannon fire. The destroyer now glowed violet and changed course to charge an allied cruiser.
So, if the Nycteus successfully hit any of their ships, they could control it.

"See?! Everything can be a puppet, even your own ships! The Other makes Naraku look like an amateur!" He heard Kagura yell from behind him. Sesshomaru dove fast, He had to get to the missiles and contain their explosions.

"I will not be some Magician's puppet." Sesshomaru stated placidly in response.

"Sesshomaru, he controls your BLOOD, and those are flying BOMBS!" Kagura could certainly be mouthy, but she had never been this irritating. Maybe she had changed since coming to this time as well. Sesshomaru's hair and white and red yukata whipped through the air in the controlled, if not stiff dive.

"Kagura. Silence." Sesshomaru frowned, the missiles careened nearly right upon them. It was time to dispatch them.

Bakusaiga powered up in a luster of green.

He dove upon the first missile launched and Sesshomaru noted it was purple in hue. Kagura was indeed correct, the magic had corrupted the vessel and its projectiles. He had to time this perfectly so he would combust the missile and be able to dodge the shrapnel that exploded from it.

He whipped back Bakusaiga prepared to let loose a vast torrent of energy.

Bakusaiga deadened in his grip.

Fresh pain lurched through his bloodstream and his body spasmed and his muscles cramped up. His tendons twitched through his right arm and his fingers stiffened straight. Before he knew it, Bakusaiga slipped from his grasp, falling through thin air. He gritted his fangs together, the blood stilled in his body as if it hardened to ice.

How!?

He had to think quickly. He could either order her back, but if he did so he'd lose his chance at the missile. He after all, still had his whip.

For the first time in hundreds of years, Sesshomaru hesitated in battle.

"Bakusaiga, to me!" Sesshomaru belatedly ordered, but she continued to plummet through the air. Did she not hear him? Or did she and not want to return to his side?

Was this due to the curse?!

She struck the surface of the sea, immediately disappearing from view.

"It's the CURSE! Don't you get it?!" Kagura rolled left as a white hot spear of pain rendered his right arm stiff, his fingers wouldn't respond. He hadn't been able to move his left arm since he arrived in Norfolk. He didn't think that it would be this dire.

His mother's knowing cold smile blipped into his vision and he forced it out.

The first missile shot past him, the heat from its flame singed the tips of his hair. He flashed his youki out into a giant globe, but was too late. He merely knocked it slightly off its deadly trajectory.

But the second!
The second missile he had a chance at destroying. He drew back his right arm and called upon his whip. He could get in close and sever the cone from the missile, much as he had the nosecone on the jet when he was first called upon the helicarrier.

He summoned his whip, and since his arm wouldn't fully cooperate, he'd have to spin his whole body down to his shoulder to destroy the missile.

A flash of his scry flooded his mind: His useless arm, Bakusaiga shattered. Thor's blue eyes, his hammer. Loki spearing Stark through, later screaming no.

Sesshomaru's eyes flashed wide. A long dormant emotion trickled into the base of his skull. Apprehension.

He buried it. He had never let fear rule him before, he wouldn't let it now. He committed and dove in a steep descent towards the second missile. With his whip of light streaming behind him he torqued his body into a tight, blinding spin.

"Oh shit, you really do have a death wish." Kagura whispered.

The missile burned impossibly hot, but that Phoenix Demon Lord he killed, Kyoura, had burned hotter. He could endure this. He twisted down the top side of the missile, his toxin carving a spiraled laceration through the metal.

"You're too close!" Kagura shouted and immediately, the entire payload combusted in a violent burst of purple fire. The initial blast concussed Sesshomaru and his vision dimmed to blackness.

Tenseiga pulsed.

Just like he did when Inuyasha had attacked him with the Wind Scar, Tenseiga flashed him away in a stream of white youki. He narrowly avoided being within the lethal blast radius of the primary explosion. Shrapnel and fire ripped through the sky tearing through his clothes and skin, blossoming the white ragged silk of his yukata red.

Dazed, Sesshomaru freefell through the air, his senses all blaring and white static.

-Maru! Look out!" was that Kagura?

Out of the corner of his darkening vision, he saw an array of dazzling lights. Countermeasures. He had read about those in the Quinjet manual.

The missile he had knocked off course struck the countermeasures, and exploded, causing a shockwave through the air. The helicarrier, however, still took some damage as he saw a small fire erupt.

The Helicarrier still flew.

He had to collect Bakusaiga, she would be deep in the salty sea by now. He would gather her and destroy their enemy one slice at a time.

His youki flashed in warning, from his peripheral vision he saw a third missile stream up from the possessed Destroyer.

The missile's target was undoubtedly the Quinjet piloted by Romanoff who had descended to attack it. Banner had long ago leapt off the Quinjet, to decimate what, Sesshomaru wasn't sure.
Romanoff didn't have time to dodge the missile, nor evacuate.

He didn't hesitate, he transformed into light and shot towards the missile.

He typically had a plan in mind, but without Bakusaiga, he had no idea what he'd do once he got there. Anger, fury bristled in chest. How dare this enemy attempt to control him! He was the greatest Demon to have ever lived! Lord of the Western Lands! Unparalleled in strength!

Sesshomaru saw red and as he came between the Quinjet and the Missile he flashed out his blue youki like a wave. He ensconced the missile in his blue youki and it instantly detonated.

The explosion shredded through his weakened youki.

PULSE.

Tenseiga amplified his blue youki, pouring every ounce of his might into absorbing the explosion. Fire and pressure built up around him and a shockwave rang out.

Sesshomaru blacked out.

...

"Wake up!" He heard a husky voice yell. Kagura.

He opened his eyes. Slick, dark grey metal cooled under his cheek. He had somehow crash landed on one of their allied ships. He struggled to his feet sluggishly and blinked to focus.

The Quinjet shrieked by, so he had indeed saved Romanoff.

His whole body ached as if Mjonlir had struck him several times. He most likely had a broken rib or two. It didn't matter. He had to get off the deck of this Destroyer before one of the humans came and found him this vulnerable. He couldn't appear weak here.

Tenseiga whimpered softly as Sesshomaru stubbornly cracked his back and leapt into the air, aiming to take down a Chariot buzzing slowly in close proximity to the Destroyer.

'You see, Demon Eternal, you are MINE.' Sesshomaru heard the Other's voice echo through his mind.

Suddenly, a whirring noise encroached from behind him. He twisted his head to see a second chariot closing in quickly, throwing something long his direction. So the first chariot had been bait!

Glinting in the sun, he surmised exactly what the object was, manacles. The same sort of manacles used in they used against him in Central Park.

A blast from a Chitauri ray gun hit him square in the side of the head. Blood flowed and pain spiked hard through his temple and his vision blacked out.

Before he knew it, the manacles magicked onto his wrists as icy clamps and yanked him downwards towards the chariot that had baited him. Through sheer determination alone, he willed his toxin to pool in his right hand and he lashed out, carving flesh out of the chest of the chitauri piloting the vehicle.

Flares of pain punched through his back as they fired relentlessly at him with their guns.
"You've got to be kidding me. DANCE OF BLADES!" Sesshomaru heard Kagura attack and the chariot cleaved apart beneath him. An edge of one of her wind blades caught him across his shoulder as a shot from one of the Chitauri hit him again in the left temple.

Between his blood chilling and needling through his body and the shot to the head, Sesshomaru fell.

Present

Barely conscious, the magic manacles hurtled him down. Sesshomaru impacted the stone-hard surface of the ocean in a buckled dive.

Darkness.

The icy void muffled his senses as the weighted manacles dragged him deeper. His body left dark red smears and curls of blood through the murky, salty water. Pressure from the ocean water threatened to rupture his circulatory, respiratory systems, and would if he were a human or lesser Demon. Yet, it was true what told Stark in the bathroom, he was an exceptional swimmer.

His body could withstand the pressure, but his ear devices buckled and broke. His manacled wrists hit the rocky bottom of the ocean floor in a muddy plume.

Distantly, he could hear Bakusaiga… but Sesshomaru couldn't place where his daughter was.

He couldn't hear Tenseiga.

His head spun in vicious wheels of pain. He tried to open his mouth, but it was an impossible feat with his shattered jaw.

Concussions of blasts thudded above him as the battle waged on without him.

'Oh, how the mighty have fallen, Demon Eternal. As soon as we are done annihilating your friends and allies, we will collect you and you will deliver the second half of the Soul Stone, Sounga, to us.' The Other's voice echoed in his head as a dark chuckle.

A growl rumbled through Sesshomaru's chest. He had to find his power here. But instead, throbbing agony overtook his senses, and everything stilled. Still water... just like the bathwater. Could he scry? Would it help?

He had to try to reach someone.

Ping.

Jaken!

Jaken's youki flickered and a flash of fresh, sharp agony cut through him.

He saw an image of Jaken in his true form, lariats grappling him down as the Aethon opened fire.

NO.

Sesshomaru's bloodshot eyes shot open underwater.

Jaken's youki signature vanished from his senses.
No. That couldn't be. Loki had assured him that Jaken would have adequate protection. Jaken couldn't have perished…impossible.

He had to reach Jaken again.

Sesshomaru pinged for his youki signature again.

Ripple.

Nothing.

Jaken was gone.

Gone.

Jaken, his trusted retainer, had been slain. Jaken had pledged his life-debt to him with no hesitation and stuck by him though some of the most difficult trials of his adulthood. Jaken had believed he was the pinnacle of Demonic Might and had listened and took to heart his instructions on how to control his True Form. Jaken had always warned him when there was trouble afoot and educated him on historical matters his father thought too trivial for him to learn, or purposely kept from him. Jaken, no matter how obstinate or cowardly he could be, always listened.

Yet, he had failed to listen to Jaken.

Jaken had warned him repeatedly that this war would be the end of them all, and he paid him no heed. He had led his most loyal vassal... no, his most loyal friend, to his death twice now.

Tenseiga had already revived him once when Jaken went to collect Tokijin from Kaijinbo and was cut down by him. Tenseiga could only resurrect someone from the dead once.

Sesshomaru, curled into himself onto the seafloor.

A different, adjacent type of pain knotted plumb in the center of his chest. It creaked open something deep and dark inside of him. A hidden, stashed away part of himself he thought he had rid himself of long ago:

Dark, cavernous loss.

How dare they take something from him he could never have back.

He would reach out to Loki, have him explain what befell Jaken.

Ping.

Loki's magic energy surged high then promptly vanished.

This caused Sesshomaru's ears to pick up. Loki had lost the ability to hide his magic signature due to The Other keeping him and tampering with his mind.

Ripple.

A flash of Loki, blue skinned, burnt, and red-eyed laying lifeless on scorched Earth darted through his mind. Rogers, injured, hunched over him, face set in a grimace. His oldest friend had been slain by the enemy. Images of Loki flashed through his mind: the amused smirk when they first met, his laughter when they acquired their first treasure, the proud angle of his chin when he crafted his Uru daggers, Their spar on the rooftop of Stark's Tower when they reunited after fifty three years,
his desperate plea.

Loki risked everything to protect this realm, and it was all for nothing. It all held no meaning now.

He didn't get the chance to witness Loki break down the Other!

Tenseiga flared to life in a spiking, bursting flash of healing blue youki. He screamed and screamed, rattling almost completely out of his sheath. Tenseiga's youki turned icy cold, and his yells ebbed into deep, haunting wails.

Tenseiga had never cried before, but now he was sobbing.

Something then, sparked to life deep within Sesshomaru.

Despite the jagged, icy pain, Sesshomaru's blood itched and boiled. The temperature of the sea water around him increased tenfold.

His blood simmered in his veins, and the ocean water around him began to glow a deep red. He'd break his enemy down to nothing. He would splinter their bones and devour their flesh.

If Jaken couldn't prove his might, he'd prove it for him. If Loki couldn't drink the blood of the Other, he'd drink it for him!

Loki had told him he'd be relied upon to lead the defense of this realm, but he would do more than just that. If they retreated, he wouldn't rest until he hunted every single Chitauri down and powdered their bones.

He'd show their enemy the unparalleled greatness they both believed him to be.

An image of a damaged red metal suit landing near Barton. Stark!

Sesshomaru reined in his emotions. If Loki and Jaken had been slain in the capital, Stark could be next. He had to focus and not lose himself here.

He needed Bakusaiga.

Ripple.

Echo.

Bakusaiga was close! Only she wasn't alone. He looked up to see Kagura floating above the sea floor a few meters from him, holding Bakusaiga in her manicured hand.

He must have looked somewhat perplexed because Kagura rolled her red eyes.

"Spirit, remember? I can literally go through anything, including water. And no, don't ask me how I can pick up your sword when I can't pick anything else up from this realm." Kagura's voice slinked through his ears as clear as if she were above water.

"Bakusaiga is a Demon. She is my progeny and no certainly no mere sword." Sesshomaru could hear Bakusaiga hum lightly, she must have taken to Kagura.

"Huh, well could have fooled me. She's not causing a racket like Tenseiga. Maybe the Other is suppressing her power as well. You know that sorcerer is going to stop at nothing to capture you, just like Naraku wanted to. He wants you so he can collect all those jewels, sound familiar?" Kagura held Bakusaiga out to him. It was eerie how natural she looked wielding a sword rather
than a fan, especially under murky, pitch black water that no human would be able to see through.

"I don't care about the Gems of the Greater Cosmos. My enemy has slain Jaken and Loki, and for that they will pay dearly." Sesshomaru seethed and Kagura frowned, her mouth turning into a small bow.

"Not that I was close to Jaken, but he didn't deserve to die here in this dirty, human infested place. Who is Loki? Don't tell me you're this upset over a human." Kagura examined Bakusaiga who remained dormant.

"Loki is an Aesir, from the realm of Asgard. He is a comrade of this Sesshomaru." Tenseiga spiked in mild and vague disagreement over what, he couldn't ascertain.

"So, you weren't always a loner, huh. You know, if their Master gets all six cosmic gems, he gets one wish. It's the shikon jewel all over again. You think these deluded warlords would come up with something more original! Ugh, how do I get caught up in these messes?" Kagura complained. So that was the purpose of the gems. They granted a wish, potential dominion over an entire galaxy for instance.

Kagura continued.

"I tried to get away from Mephisto, but as long as I remain a spirit, he can control me." Kagura's face contorted into anger.

"So, you're a puppet once more." Sesshomaru thought about this. So that is why Ryukotsusei wanted to be purified, to be free of Mephisto's control.

"I can't harm him as a spirit since he conjured me. Hakudoshi believes if we can get our own bodies, we can defy him. If I get my own body, I can cleave his head from his shoulders and make his corpse dance." Kagura grinned in glee.

"You claim you cannot harm the enemy, yet you destroyed their chariot." Sesshomaru still awkwardly squatted on the seafloor, the manacles still preventing him from standing.

Kagura canted her head to the side.

"Hmm, I don't why I could do that. Hakudoshi tried to damage their ships before and couldn't do it. Maybe I just wanted it more." Kagura furrowed her eyebrows in thought and Bakusaiga chirped softly.

She began to glow a faint green.

Sesshomaru's eyes sharpened in realization, Kagura's dampened Demonic energy was feeding Bakusaiga and awakening her.

Tenseiga then hummed at his side, he knew this hum.

He only sang like this when he wanted to revive someone.

"You wished to barter with this Sesshomaru, here is your chance. Cut through these manacles, and I will bestow upon you the ability to cut through those who keep you." Sesshomaru spoke through his youki and Kagura paused and canted her head to one side.

"That's not what I wanted to barter over, but a woman in my situation can't afford to be picky. You got yourself a deal." Kagura flashed a sharp smile and held out Bakusaiga.
Sesshomaru quirked an eyebrow.

"I can't use my wind underwater. Here's hoping if my wind can cut through their technology, I can with your daughter." Kagura could always read him even when he said nothing. Quick as a breeze, Kagura swung Bakusaiga and she sliced cleanly through the chains.

Kagura and Sesshomaru blinked in mild disbelief.

Immediately the magic wore off and Sesshomaru tore the remnants off his wrists. His limbs still encumbered due to the water tension and pressure. His hair and clothes still floated around him as Kagura held out Bakusaiga closer to Sesshomaru, her spirit shimmering in ethereal light from Tenseiga.

"Here. Now your turn to uphold your si—" Kagura's response was immediately cut off when Sesshomaru grabbed onto Bakusaiga's hilt.

Standing, ankle deep in demonic blood, three Demons and one Hanyou both glanced upwards. Where dark, polluted water once enveloped them, now clusters of winking stars fell all around them. The stars collided into each other, as if at war with each other.

Far off, he heard the screams of the souls from Sounga, however he knew his cursed birthright wasn't near.

"This lake of blood smells like you! Is all this your blood?!!" Kagura recoiled back in disgust.

"It's my father's, and the blood of grandmother's Eternal ancestors. It's why we can walk on the Astral Plane. The blood acts like a scrying mirror, and the bones of the leyline guide us." Bakusaiga weakly explained. It all clicked into place. Sesshomaru remembered when his mother attacked him with that Astral Lagoon attack and collected his blood. She must have been preparing him to gain his power at some point.

Sesshomaru reached out to Bakusaiga, but she turned away, panting, and exhausted, little chest heaving. Frustration pricked through him, the curse was affecting her as well. He gently turned her towards him and his jaw dropped slightly. Her markings, even the ones on her eyelids, had turned blue, just like the ones on his left arm.

"Bakusaiga, this curse ails you too." Sesshomaru's voice darkened. It was one thing to curse him, it was an entire other matter to curse his daughter.

"I'm the greatest weapon in existence, I can withstand this, father." Bakusaiga wheezed, smiling faintly. She reminded him too much of himself.

"Hey, I'm still over here. Shorty, why did you bring us here, now?" Kagura asked, now gazing up and around, eyes wide.

Sesshomaru had the same question.

"I'm not that short, and I didn't do this. Someone strong called us, but don't worry, my Leyline also cloaks us from their sight. Whoever wanted to speak to us, they're fighting off the Other to talk to us." Bakusaiga whispered, breathy and weak then collapsed. Sesshomaru tried to reach out and catch her, but he too fought an overwhelming wave of freezing pain that struck him down to his knees.
"My Lord! Bakusaiga! Please, stay conscious, I can't navigate a scry nor the Astral Plane!"
Tenseiga had a barely conscious Bakusaiga in his blue arms.

Blue?

"Re-lax Tenseiga, geez, just a little light headed. What happened to your skin, why are you blue and cold?" Bakusaiga reeled back and managed to stand, albeit doubled over, hands on her knees.

"What is the meaning of this, Tenseiga? Why are you blue as well as and Bakusaiga's markings?"
Sesshomaru looked over Tenseiga and sure enough, his skin had turned a cornflower blue, with raised arched lines across his cheeks just like his father's markings. Or Inuyasha's when he'd let his blood lust overtake him.

"What? They're not supposed to be blue?" Kagura pointed her fan, uneasily stepping back from him.

He still glowed a white blue, youki bubbling off him into the starry expanse of the Astral Plane. Was she afraid she would be purified?

"It's complicated, my Lord. I'll explain my appearance later, first I need to revive Lady Kagura's spirit." Tenseiga stood tall, apparently unaffected by his new appearance.

"Oh, like you did with Ruykotsusei?! Like hell I'll let you purify me once I got my shot at freedom." Kagura snarled and unfurled her fan, wind coiled around them and Tenseiga put out a placating hand.

"Not Purify. Ryukotsusei's spirit had no fight for life left, so he was sent back to the Underworld, to be left at rest. You, however, wish for life, fight for freedom. I can release the corruption on your spirit for you to achieve just that. I don't know why I couldn't revive you back in our era, but I feel I can revive you now. It's an instinct deep in my youki." Tenseiga hastily explained, almost pleadingly. Sesshomaru had never seen Tenseiga look repentant before, but the gleam in his golden eyes shown true.

If he hadn't seen Tenseiga's might and usefulness firsthand, he would have claimed he was too soft to be a blade, and a shawl would befit him better. He wasn't responsible for what befell Kagura.

Kagura flipped shut her fan realizing the same.

"That wasn't on you. Do your thing quick, then, and let's get out of here. I got things to do." Kagura snapped and to his credit, Tenseiga looked down to his ailing Lord for affirmation before teaching out his hand to her chest.

The white light from his hand shown as bright as the lighthouse he had seen on the island. Kagura squinted as the blood pool they stood in began to whirl and stretch upwards over her form.

Strangely enough, blood also began to stream upward, filling in wounds he sustained in battle with the Chitauri, including his head wound.

"Hold still it's working!" Tenseiga's triangle shaped ears flapped down in concentration as Demonic Blood from the Astral Lagoon coated Kagura's spiritual form. Was Tenseiga calling upon his own Demonic blood to revive Kagura?

As soon as the light stopped from Tenseiga, the blood had congealed and changed form. Slowly, the blood shifted to reveal a very real, a very alive Kagura. Sesshomaru's ears pricked up.
Impossible.

He could hear her rapid heartbeat, smell her sweat, and a scent of rain and flowers. She looked exactly the same, with the exception of two magenta markings on her neck that curled up into a spiral and two magenta dots on the outside of each of her eyes.

"I don't think this is what Inukimi had in mind for the Astral Lagoon, but I don't believe I care!" Tenseiga gasped excitedly. While she was a far cry from his powers, she was every bit a Demon Lady.

No one spoke for a moment as stars continued to collide around them.

"I have a heartbeat. I can breathe. I'm alive." Kagura gasped in disbelief, patting herself down.

"Well, that is what Tenseiga is good at. Father, I'm receiving a vision! The person who wanted to talk to us prevailed over The Other! I can show them to you, if you'd like, Father." Bakusaiga said, and turned to Sesshomaru who merely nodded. Precisely at that time the stars stopped colliding, and swirled around to reveal a being Sesshomaru had not seen in centuries, and only met a handful of times.

Yet he would not forget that regal face.

"Queen Frigga. How timely." Sesshomaru set his jaw and used every ounce of free will to stagger to stand. He would not allow himself to kneel before the queen of a raving half blind warlord.

"Finally, I'm able to see you and your consort, Lord Sesshomaru, and oh, you have a Demon Lady with you. My apologies for scrying you in this manner, but this is serious." Frigga looked panicked and grief stricken, yet she wasn't blameless herself.

He didn't need some lofty Aesir to tell him that they were in the middle of a serious predicament.

"So, you're Frigga, Loki the magic user, and Storm God's mother. We know about Loki, we felt him fall. Tenseiga's literally blue over it." Bakusaiga muttered, squaring up to the image as well. His eyes narrowed as fresh pain crawled up his left arm. He knew Bakusaiga didn't particularly like Loki, but seeing Tenseiga's reaction to him falling tempered her bite a bit.

"I know. I know, my child. That is originally why I scryed you, but something else has occurred with my other son while you have been here on the Astral Plane. Thor has succumbed to the same mind altered state as Loki. Thor has the scepter, and is currently battling in the tower with a Priest, a Blue Luphemoid, and a possessed mortal. Everyone in that Metropolis, the Big Apple, is in acute danger." Frigga wrung her hands; it then became apparent she had been crying. Crying over how she allowed Odin to ruin both of her sons most likely.

How could Thor had been so dense? No, something had to have transpired to call Thor back to Stark's fortress. The enemy! Could their attacks on the two other cities been a mere ploy to get to the scepter somehow?

"Hmph, I told Hakudoshi his plan to take that scepter would never work. Even if he got to it, there was no way he could even hold it, much less use it. Then, if he could manipulate that blue mechanical woman into helping us, she can't be depended upon. Too unstable, just like Muso was." Kagura explained and Sesshomaru sighed through his nose. He should have seen this tactic coming. Loki should have too. They had thought the enemy would forgo regaining the scepter if they had put themselves out in the open. After all, they had only gone after the scepter to capture one of them.
Only, the Other had captured Thor instead of him or Loki. Unfortunate and irritating.

If he had to duel Thor, he would have to devote his entire attention to it, and not be able to assist in the battle against his true enemy. It had not been overlong ago since he had dueled Thor, but it had been five hundred years for the Aesir. How much stronger had Thor gotten in half a millennium? Had Thor been obscuring his aptitude with Mjolnir much like he had been with Bakusaiga? He didn't wield Mjolnir when he last matched against him, not that the melee tournaments would ever really allow for weapons.

Well, except for that one Vanir who smuggled in those daggers, but he won that melee handedly regardless.

Thor had not revealed much in the way of his skills since he had been in this time...could he possibly be as powerful as his mother's scry showed him?

It didn't matter. If it came to it, he would kill Thor.

"Queen Frigga, why do you continue to waste this Sesshomaru's time then?" Sesshomaru nearly growled out, patience wearing thin.

"Because I know how to rid yourself of the curse, but first I want...." Queen Frigga turned to Tenseiga. "I want you to revive Loki, and to use mercy on Thor but if it comes to it, I will not slight you if he meets Valhalla by your sword. I'd rather him dead than see him turn into a slave of our enemy." Frigga pursed her lips and Sesshomaru's eyes narrowed into suspicious sickles.

How could she have known that Tenseiga could revive the dead?

"How do you know about Tenseiga? Loki, said that you didn't believe in him! That his true nature was only stories!" Bakusaiga scrunched her claws into Sesshomaru's yukata, struggling to stand. Frigga couldn't have seen Tenseiga revive Kagura just now, she admitted to not even knowing she was present.

"I too thought they were mere stories. I've been scrying you all in the big apple since Heimdall's vision was blocked. I saw you revive that adolescent boy, the thief who attacked your dear Rin and Jaken. I just know you can do the same for Loki, repay what he did for you." Frigga explained and Sesshomaru's face froze. So, the Distant Realm had found a way to spy on him other than their all-seeing sentry.

Sesshomaru also had dually noted that she was attempting to barter with him for the fates of her sons with the knowledge of how to break his curse. He wanted to say that he wouldn't accept this barter. That he didn't need her assistance.

"Please, accept my barter and help me save my sons." Frigga begged. How unbecoming.

Loki and Jaken were gone, and Thor was now possessed by the enemy. Stark and Rin had been fine when he left for the Astral Plane, but he already knew time flowed differently here than on Earth. If he continued to bicker with Queen Frigga here, when he returned to Earth it could be hours later.

Yet, if she truly cared about this realm, wouldn't she have simply given him this information from the start? It still held true, only Jaken and Stark gave him something he wanted without anything in return.

He remembered Stark's sly smile, his caress on his wrists.
Sesshomaru's chest constricted, he hoped that Stark wouldn't try to try to duel Thor in his fortress. While Stark was a commendable adversary, Thor was an Aesir and his power was not to be understated. However, nothing would stop Stark from protecting his fortress and those inside it, like Miss Potts and Rin...

Rin! She was in the fortress along with Polly.

Sesshomaru knew the answer.

"No." Sesshomaru said simply. "This Sesshomaru will overcome this curse by his own means and merit." Sesshomaru's gaze darkened and sharpened. There were scant exceptions in his life where his instincts told him incorrectly about barter. He had a dark feeling about this one. It was if he accepted Queen Frigga's assistance, he'd be at the mercy of the Distant Realm later.

Queen Frigga at first appeared shell shocked, then regained her composure.

"I see. You're still stubborn and distrusting. Though, suppose if I were you, I wouldn't trust me either. I, however, trust in Loki's faith, and Thor's respect of you to overcome this and defend Midgard." Frigga smiled wanly and Sesshomaru fought the urge to cut her image down, but she wasn't worth it.

"Leave us, Queen Frigga. Do not attempt to contact this Sesshomaru again." Sesshomaru warned placidly. He doubted she would, but he wanted to make it clear that his only contact with the Distant Realm would be on his terms, not theirs. Sesshomaru noticed that Tenseiga's face turned stricken and pale.

"I understand, good luck, Lord Sesshomaru. I'm sure our paths will cross in the future." The vision vanished and Sesshomaru sighed though his nose. It wasn't a total loss, he had an idea of how to rid himself of the curse, thanks to Queen Frigga.

"...Just great. Another busybody, no wonder you're buddy-buddy with her, Tenseiga." Bakusaiga grumbled, scrunching her nose.

"I don't get it, you bartered with me, why not her? She seemed to actually care about whatever you got dragged into." Kagura snapped, genuine confusion darkening her features.

Sesshomaru paused. He hadn't realized his own contradiction.

"I don't know her." Sesshomaru said simply.

"And you know me?" Kagura challenged incredulous. Was she being dense on purpose? No, her levels of deception didn't draw that deeply.

"Yes. You are Kagura of the wind and now of my blood. You are this Sesshomaru's ally." He just leveled a sharp, stony gaze at her.

"You have changed." Kagura's eyes flashed wide and soft briefly before she hid behind her fan.

"My Lord, how do you plan on lifting the curse without Queen Frigga's help?!" Tenseiga asked tentatively, ears flat on his head.

"Queen Frigga, for all her wisdom, gave away the method in her delivery. Bakusaiga, I need you to return to your blade form." Sesshomaru ordered and she nodded and returned to her blade form to his right hand. The ivory leyline dangled and glinted from her hilt.
Bakusaiga said she could hide them from the Other here, perhaps that meant he could disable the curse here as well.

He raised his left arm, still throbbing and pulsing in agony and pushed the long sleeve of his yukata back. The Other had carved his signature on his left arm, the weakest, newest part of his being. His left arm was also directly linked with Bakusaiga, as they she had sprung from it. It had to be why she was affected with the curse.

He gazed at the cerulean blue markings with disgust.

He didn't need his left arm before against Naraku, and he certainly didn't need it now. He had fought before with only his right arm, and he would do so again.

Enough hesitation.

He brought Bakusaiga down cleanly over his accursed left arm, right at the faint scar that Tessaiga carved long ago.

Bakusaiga shrieked high, as if shocked by a Thunder Demon.

"MY LORD!" Tenseiga's shout rang out as Sesshomaru's left arm fell, only to hover in mid-air above the Blood Lagoon, along with the blackened, diseased blood that poured freely from his severed limb. Tenseiga ran to his arm to heal and staunch the bleeding as his arm and the diseased blood began to dissolve from Tenseiga's purification. Sesshomaru didn't need Tenseiga's help, but he accepted it anyway due to being distracted with relief.

The pain, the scorching cold agony arcing through his blood finally ceased. He let out a breath he didn't know he was holding. He should have thought of this solution earlier, he had let his mother blind him from the easiest, quickest answer. Always cut loose what weakened you. Always break free of what clearly held you back.

"Talk about full circle, didn't know you felt this nostalgic about the past." Kagura reared back her head, scoffing behind her fan.

"It's time to return to the battle." Sesshomaru wasn't entirely sure how long it had been since he was in the Astral Plane, but he knew that his body, wherever it was under the water, would most likely be fine.

"Uh, sure, but you know we're at the bottom of the ocean right? I can't swim!" Kagura balked, eyes flashing bright crimson.

"Not my concern." Sesshomaru responded mildly and the stars began to swirl around them, fading into blackness.

"WHAT? Weren't you the one being a softy about how we were allies?!" Kagura paled and Sesshomaru glanced mildly over to Tenseiga. He had another idea.

"Tenseiga to Kagura." He ordered and almost immediately he assumed his blade form and shot over to her. She would need him soon anyway to accomplish a task he had for her.

"You want to give me your savior Hanyou sword? What's the catch?" Kagura held Tenseiga in her hand in his blade form.

"Queen Frigga gave me another idea. You will go to the capital of this province and revive Loki of Asgard with Tenseiga. Tenseiga will lead you to his body. Afterwards, you will meet me in the
metropolis called the Big Apple." Sesshomaru informed as the stars began to dim around them back into the sea water.

"Yo, you can't order me around! If I do this, then I get the barter I really want. I want you to help us find Kanna." Kagura smirked slyly, her new magenta markings by her eyes crinkling.

"Us? Kanna?" Sesshomaru's eyebrows knit together. Kanna. Wasn't that another of Naraku's incarnation? The girl who gifted him with the mirror shard to minic Tessaiga with?

"Hakudoshi and I. He is sadistic, but after what we went through together with Mephisto…" Kagura trailed off, eyes distant. "Anyway, Kanna was just as much as his sister as she was mine. When Kanna died, her spirit didn't go to the Demonic Underworld because she was of the void, so she must be out there, drifting. We wish to be reunited with her, be free together, get it?! So you will help us find her spirit in exchange for me reviving your dead Aesir friend." Kagura explained, glancing at Tenseiga's blade, he shimmered a new blue hue.

So, she and Hakudoshi had an alliance. That, by proxy made Hakudoshi his ally. How irksome.

"I acquiesce." Sesshomaru affirmed with a tip of his pointed jaw.

In a blink the sea rushed in.

Sesshomaru's lungs had filled with salt water, but he could hold out for a few minutes longer.

As Tenseiga aided Kagura upwards to the surface he surmised that he had been absent for far too long.

The blackened wreckage of ships, at least three destroyers, and a cruiser, littered the ocean floor around him.

The ominous presence of the Nycteus still overwhelmed his youki senses above. The battle still waged.

He'd end it now.

He drew Bakusaiga and she sang sharp, high, and vicious.

Her signature green youki lit the entire ocean floor in a poisonous, thrashing green aura that soon vortexed and condensed into a familiar attack he had not used in a long time.

His signature dragon strike.

The ocean water whirlpoled around him as a magnificent green dragon coiled around him. He had never before rendered one with such ferocity and clarity. The massive head and open, sharp-toothed jaws of the dragon rose upwards, as if it's goal was to drag the sky down into the sea.

Sesshomaru opened his eyes and they glowed a sinister red.

This was for Jaken.

"Jade Dragon Strike!" He bellowed deeply through his youki as an acid green dragon launched brutally upwards, shocking all the wreckage away from him in a singular, murky seismic wave.

His youki told him his attack struck the Nycteus as a direct hit.

Now for the killing blow.
He crouched low under the water and with a deft spring of his legs he leapt, exhaling all the way to burst from the surface of the sea.

In a burst of blue youki he dried himself and shot up into the sky, calculating a landing on the closest available surface, a nearby cruiser. Bakusaiga celebrated in his right hand as he pointed the tip of her blade into the sky for a follow up attack.

Most of the Nycteus had already begun to crumple and corrode into nothingness.

"Witness your meager power be instantly eclipsed by mine!" Sesshomaru taunted, markings dancing as a torrential, crackling wave of decomposition youki crested into the overcast sky.

The cetaceans shrieked in pain as their flesh deteriorated, and the chariots ashed to nothing into the wind. He insured the wave spared what few jets still streaked through the air.

As the last vestiges of his pitiful enemy flaked apart, Sesshomaru sheathed Bakusaiga and assessed the losses around him.

The first thing he noticed was that the helicarrier was nowhere in sight. It must have been destroyed by their enemy, a logically high priority target.

Fire, oil, and wreckage floated among other jetsam on the surface. The aircraft carrier, USS Bush CVN 77, had taken some damage. The Carrier Strike Group Two assigned to it had taken significant losses, four of its six destroyers and its cruiser had sunk.

The other aircraft carrier, the USS Truman CVN 75 listed heavily to its port side, crippled and inoperable. However, with the exception of the destroyer, that had been used against them, all of its Strike Group destroyers remained operable. It's cruiser currently was sinking into the harbor.

The base itself, however, had taken substantial damage. Sesshomaru wasn't knowledgeable enough to determine how much repair the naval station would require, but it was enough to make him crinkle his nose.

However, the naval vessels had taken down many Cetaceans on their own, as shown by their floating, blooded carcasses. Felled chariots also speckled the sea and ground, along with boated, broken Chitauri bodies. Large, charred, violet panels also had impaled themselves in the seawall and in parts of the ships, indicating that their attacks had proven effective against the Nycteus before he finished her off.

This was neither a defeat nor victory for either side.

Nothing to be done now, he had to be off to see to Rin. His youki reserves had depleted some, but he could fly to Stark's fortress swiftly enough.

"You had us going for real there, Pretty Boy. Tony finally swore to stop asking for a status report every thirty seconds after he saw that massive energy dragon. He said 'Saves me time that I don't have to go drag him out of Davy Jones Locker by his fluff.'" Romanoff's voice sounded entirely too loud and muddled from behind him. He'd need yet another pair of the hearing dampeners. He turned to see her bruised, but standing straight.

"Stark lives." Sesshomaru asked more than stated. He pinged for his youki, but with his own youki reserves so low, he was having trouble getting a sure-read.

"Yes, he's alive, rough shape, but alive. He is en-route to the tower with Steve." Romanoff nodded.
Sesshomaru's shoulders relaxed and his face softened in hidden relief. Even his ears raised, pleased.

"You shouldn't have saved me back there. Because of that, you deviated from your mission and were almost captured. Glad you're in one piece." Her features remained pallid and hard as metal.

Was she irate that he saved her? Ridiculous. He would not be blamed for an outcome no one could have predicted. A breeze ripped off the water and blew through his empty yukata sleeve

"Oh, mostly in one piece." Romanoff amended her statement, startled and a recognizable stench filled his nostrils. Guilt.

He would employ the same tactic he used on Loki during the Uru stone quest when he felt similarly guilty.

"This Sesshomaru did not save you, he destroyed a projectile that was in his path. If you were spared as a result, it was mere coincidence. This Sesshomaru does as he pleases." Sesshomaru blinked, aloof.

"Smooth, Pretty Boy, fine I'll let you win this round." Romanoff smiled dimly. "We lost two-thirds of our forces here, not to mention the losses in DC. Loki, Jaken, and Rhodes are confirmed KIA, and Thor is MIA with the scepter. We think he succumbed to its mind control as multiple cameras spotted him flying over New York with it. We aren't entirely sure what the losses are in Stark Tower, but Clint hasn't responded to any mayday. Overall, this wasn't a win. We know Loki told us there would be losses, but...this is sobering for the first wave." She informed him, voice thick, biting her lip. He could smell the stress and tension wafting off her even over the salt. The youki in Stark Tower's arc reactor only told him if it or its inhabitants were in danger. Since the enemy had left, he had no idea who remained alive.

He had a firm belief that Rin lived, something deep in his youki reassured him.

"I'm returning to Stark's fortress, if you wish to accompany me to see to Barton, you may." Sesshomaru materialized his pelt, and Romanoff debated for a brief minute before pressing her hand to her earpiece.

"Agent Hill, I leave the rest to you, I am reporting back to Point Tango. Banner is currently stable, but unconscious on the deck of the CVN 75. He may need medical." Romanoff reported crisply into her mic and stood next to him.

He wrapped the white pelt around her as his blue youki sparked back to life.

"What was that streak of blue light leaving the ocean with the trajectory of DC? Did it have something to do with your missing blue sword, Tenseiga?" Romanoff asked, motioning to Tenseiga's empty sheath as their forms melded into dazzling light.

He wished Romanoff had other targets for her impeccable powers of observation. It strangely reminded him of the movie night, when she had eyed him sitting next to Stark for the first time.

Pause.

"In the educational film, the Empire Strikes back, do you remember what turned the tide of battle for Luke during the execution scene in the desert with the carnivorous Plant Demon?" Sesshomaru asked through the light.

"I'll humor you only because you're driving. Luke signaled for R2-D2 to launch his lightsaber off
Jabba's sail barge to him." Romanoff sounded almost offended, but mostly irritated and distracted.

"You just answered your own inquiry, Romanoff." Sesshomaru calmly informed and he heard her scoff beside him, despite the seriousness of the situation. Due to the rushing of wind, he couldn't make out what he heard, but it was probably nothing complimentary.

Chapter End Notes

hello!!!!!!

I am back!

Thank you all who have stuck with me so far, and I hope you please please continue to drop me a comment and let me know what you think about this chapter.

Yes, Kagura is back, and we shall see what happens from here!

- TL

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