

Hey all. Sorry it took me so long to post this. RL is still really intense right now, and I just haven't gotten the motivation to go back and finish this fic. I am just about halfway through Stallion though, so there's a plus... right? GRAAAHHHH.

Epilogue: An Ending, and a Beginning

"So we are agreed that technology and in particular medical supplies will be the core of our demands? You'll note I'm not bringing up the breakdown of who can get how much again," Harry drawled looking around the table at the other delegates, his eyes both sharp and annoyed.

All of the delegates around the table bar Dr. Doom looked tired, although Harry found he still had energy to spare, despite how frustrated this whole conversation had been. The conversation on what to demand from the Skrull Fleet and their Empire up to this point had been vituperative to say the least. Several wanted to be paid or receive compensation straight from Harry and the empire, others wanted specifics, while the American president wanted the Skrull fleet's smaller units to be turned over to Earth as fee simple.

But finally, with a few concessions on his part, a few side deals between the others, and a lot of discussion, the peace treaty that the humans would agree to with the Skrull was written. It had taken it two weeks and Harry is new time dilation chamber, and yet, all of the locals hadn't suffered a even a minor headache thanks to some changes made to the time dilation array. It was now way more power intensive, but that was fine by Harry.

"I am not looking forward to telling my people that we have made this agreement with the Skrull. The public will want a scapegoat, and I don't doubt we all saw demonstrations demanding blood in our countries before we came up here. But I do agree that this distribution of resources is one that we can all live with," Chancellor Wen Lo Di of China said, running one hand down his face and then up into his hair, looking nervous at being the first to speak, but also grateful that the others allowed him to do so.

Wen Lo Di was a middle-aged Chinaman who had served with distinction in the Eurasian War before being wounded and medically discharged. At that point, Wen entered the CCP. He had been a city mayor when the Chitauri invasion hit, and had taken over the local military base, kept order in his area, and set up defenses that downed several of their skimmers. After the war ended, he was one of very few CCP officers who had gained any notoriety in the invasion. That made him one of five who stood for a general election among their fellows in the National People's Congress.

To Harry's eyes, Wen had yet to get used to the fact that this entire meeting was occurring in space aboard a space station (complete with garden, a restaurant run by house elves whose cooking could match any five-star chef's) and magic in general. Let alone Harry himself. But he tried, and had not allowed himself to be browbeaten by the older, more experienced members of this council, belaboring the point that China needed more in the way of preparations either from the rest of the world or from the Skrull, without losing an ounce of pride in his nation.

Contrary to the prediction he had rather casually thrown off for Jean in her Phoenix persona, the Mandarin had discovered that truth had its own sharp tip. The nuclear assault on the gateway, recorded by his own drones, and then snatched out of the communications network by Pinoptes only to return after hostilities had ended, had proven too much. The fact that those missiles which he had thrown had found themselves exploding in Chinese cities had been simply too much.

The mob had come for the Mandarin, and the military apparatus that should have stopped that, should have helped the leader of the People's party staying power, had been **guttled** by the invasion. Whole bases had been wiped out by surprise Skimmer assaults, the air force had been cut to ribbons, and the navy, such as it was, had been mauled when they followed orders from on high to assault Taiwan.

Harry had then turned to the screws, although only partly because he knew it would in fact hurt the Mandarin's position further. No, that had merely been a side benefit of, as Melody put it, being a hero. In this case, that meant opening up hoarded amounts of Magical Minds potions and medical supplies, and then offered his own and Ororo's magic-based healing to the, well, the entire world, frankly. Harry had started in China, while Ororo had started in America, and they'd worked their way towards one another via Europe.

They hadn't been able to save everyone, of course. There had been simply too many wounded, both civilian and combatants for that of course, even with Harry being able to heal busloads of people at a time thanks to his Titan Form powerup. Harry had even had to retreat into a time dilation chamber for a consultation with Strange and the others magicals to figure out spells that could heal radiation damage in large groups.

Between them, Harry, Freya and Steven had figured out a spell that could reverse the cellular degeneration cause by the radiation. A spell that, once more, most would have had trouble powering without asking for aid from the Elder Gods of magic as Strange did. Harry however didn't need it, and coupled with another spell to fight the background radiation, Harry had saved millions of lives outside of the blast zones that had been the centers of Dongguan and Foshan.

In so doing, the magicals had rather accidentally opened up an entirely new study for Reed Richards and the bio-scientists of Magical Minds, but that didn't really matter much to Harry.

What did matter was that the Mandarin's power had not survived a week after Thanos's death. China was still very leery of foreign influence, but Harry had not only extended medical aid, but aid in many other areas, and had offered a seat at this table to the Chancellor came into power after the Mandarin was ousted.

Ousted he thought now, watching President Jean D'Merceau pontificate. *Such a small banal word. The man was literally torn limb from limb despite his 'magic' rings. If I hadn't been busy healing the radiated civilians around Dongguan... well, I suppose that even as a Titan, one thing hasn't changed. I can't be in two places at once.*

Finally the Paris-born French president wound down, and Duncan stood up, frowning a little as he brought up a holographic representation of the document they were in the process of finalizing. "I'm afraid that my points are not nearly as heartfelt as Jean's. My nation didn't come under direct assault, after all. There are, however, a few issues with the wording of this, and in particular this segment, where we warn against further reprisals against Earth and what we will do if such are attempted."

Duncan manipulated the console in front of him and the portions he was speaking of enlarged, copying itself and hovering in front of each of the delegates. "Specifically, we mentioned that any hint of infiltration will be answered by force. I don't think that is a tone we should take, for two reasons. One, we're still not in a position to really take it to an empire the size of the Skrull's. We can bring more power to a point, for certain. But how often can we do so before our spear tip starts to break?"

"I see you are practicing your eloquence on us. Very well, consider us if not impressed, then at least amused, Duncan," Doom announced. "Yet you bring up a good point."

"But they **need** to understand that they cannot get out of not paying their reparations to us. We've kept them deliberately light so far and China understands what it means to be under the roots of a conqueror, how little choice you have in certain matters. But still, they must pay," Wen argued, not understanding the point Duncan was making.

"I still think we're being extremely lenient there," the Russian representative uttered, wiping his glasses on a small silk handkerchief. Andre Ilovoko had been the man Harry had thought of as the 'thoughtful Russian' in the discussions after the Eurasian War, and had been elected to take part in this debate. "Industrial and medical technology is well and good, but we need more ways to beat our gravity well."

"We've already been over this," Samuel Northton, the American president said shaking said. "And if anyone at this table should be rightfully annoyed at the fact that our space defense relies entirely on a second party, it should be me. So unless all of you were hiding some kind of planning in your pockets for a similar ability?"

"The only talk of that nature I know of comes from a joint European Union space station program and it has barely gotten off the ground for lack of funding. And admittedly, trust in Harry Potter and the Avalon Empire," The Frenchman muttered, shaking said.

Like the Chinese presence, the French presence at this table might well have surprised many people despite the recent battle for Paris. Those people would've been idiots, people who were hung up on the French surrender during World War II. Armchair historians who didn't realize that it had been the French who had mostly held the line World War I, and who had a history of proud martial tradition going back for far longer.

Now though, Harry doubted anyone would ever doubt French elan again. Once it became clear that the aliens were no longer in any position to send cutting out expeditions away from Paris, the French had ordered the Oh Damns and the rest of the foreign aid out of the city. *Not that there were that many of my men left by then.* The final reclaiming of Paris would go to the French alone. It was a matter of pride, and it was one that Harry felt was rather self-destructive, but he hadn't argued at the time, needing more hands on deck in China. And the French had paid in blood for their pride.

"And speaking of reparations," Dr. Doom, said looking over at Harry. "When will you and your lady begin to work on rebuilding the various cities destroyed during the war and in what order? You hinted at doing so, but you didn't give us a set time frame."

"While we've been stuck in here, my lady should already have begun the task. I believe it was her plan to start in Paris, but work her way outwards, not completing each city at a time, but concentrating on the most historically and socially important areas first," Harry explained. "Realize however, that when you're talking about laser weapons and plasma-based weapons, magical reconstruction will not be a cure all. There will still be a lot of hard work ahead of every nation hit by the invasion."

The American president barked a laugh, and doctors snorted inside his mask. "I believe that no one at this table could raise their hands and say that their country is afraid of hard work."

He looked over at the Frenchman, who bristled a bit at that shot. It was a well known fact that French work hours were considered something of a joke in much of the world.

“Getting back on the point, please, gentlemen,” Duncan said, rapping the table with two fingers gently. “The other reason why I think we should change the wording on this area of the document is because it hints at the fact that we can discover such infiltration. Do we want the Skrull to know we have magical means of outing their infiltrators?”

That was a good question and Dr. Doom leaned back in his chair tapping his fingers together thoughtfully, creating a metallic tinkle that echoed around the room. “You bring up an interesting dilemma. Is it better to play our cards close, hide such abilities ready to use when they attempt to attack us again, or is it better to try and stave off that almost inevitable assault by hinting at such abilities? Yes, that is quite the conundrum. My vote would be to keep it close, or make the wording deliberately vague.”

“How certain are we that we **will** be able to detect them? I know you’re anti-infiltration arrays were supposed to work against those dire wraiths that tried to take over Russia, but how accurate do you think they will be when it comes to the Skrull?” Samuel asked.

Harry scowled a bit, leaning back in his chair. “The truth of the matter is that from the wreckage of the space battle we were able to collect a lot of DNA samples from the bodies of dead Skrull. It turns out that the Dire Wraiths are something of a genetic offshoot of the Skrull. Possibly banished in the ancient past for using magic? Who knows? Regardless, the Skrull powers are on the genetic level, so the same array can find both of them. We’re not 100% certain, but we’re close.”

“Did we take any prisoners in that battle?” Dr. Doom asked, a finger twitching as he looked at something only his eyes could see underneath his mask. “You did, several hundred.”

“Repatriating them could be a feather in our caps,” the American president mused, looking narrowly at Dr. Doom. “And why did you bring it up now?”

“Will your runic arrays work on Skrull when they are not shifted into other forms?”

Harry shook his head, and Dr. Doom nodded. “In that case, we would have to... coerce them into acting as we wish. And we do not need to send them all back surely. There are numerous experiments we could run in order to discern ways to actually halt their transformation skill.”

That was a cold, somewhat scary thought, which fit Dr. Doom obviously. And much against his will, Harry found himself nodding a little. It made sense from a leader’s perspective. But Harry wasn’t just a leader. He was a hero. Either way, there were just some things he could not condone. Those prisoners are mine, Dr., and I am afraid I cannot accept experimenting on them in such a manner. If they agree, that is one thing, but no medical experiments whatsoever.”

While Doom scoffed, the others all nodded. The changes to the document were quickly made. A few other minor word changes, mostly proposed by Duncan and Dr. Doom, were hammered out, and finally, the document was finished. Harry opened up a communications ending the time, since that would have messed with the communications aspect quite a bit.

Moments later, Fleet Overlord Len'Dok appeared, looking somewhat haggard, and tired. "I realize you humans do not run on the same clock as my fleet, but surely you could've figured out that this is the middle of the night over here."

"Since when do prisoners dictate such terms to prison guards?" Doom asked caustically. "You're in no position whatsoever to make such comments. Let alone demands."

"Dr. Doom is quite correct. We wouldn't even need our conventional forces to deal with you, remember that. However, we are not calling you merely to threaten. We are in fact calling you to tell you we have finalized the peace document between the Skrull and humanity," Harry announced.

"You have!?" The Fleet Overlord barred his teeth in annoyance. "Surely you mean you have completed the document you will wish us to go over and edits to our own satisfaction correct?"

"Such a thing would only happen between equals. We are not," the American president leaned forward. "This is called shotgun diplomacy. I have a shotgun, therefore you will be diplomatic."

Harry cocked his head. That was not in point of fact what that phrase meant. But he was willing to go with it for now. "We are dictating these terms, it will be up to you and your other leaders and have stated you have no wish to be the sole leader of your people, who will make the final decision. In that case, I hope they are simple enough for this old sailor to understand, and not nearly as horrible as they might be."

Len'Dok made to speak but Harry held up a hand, counting off points on his fingers. That this allowed him to give the Skrull his finger was merely incidental, even if it did earn him a few carefully disguised snorts from the Russian and American presidents. "You lack magic. You lack enough superpowered individuals to fight us on an equal footing, while we have enough to launch attacks and defend Earth at the same time. Your basic scientific level might be larger than our own, but that gap is closing rapidly due to our resident geniuses. You have the numbers and industry, but also have prior commitments both within your empire and in the form of a par enemy."

Len'Dok flinched at that, but Harry went on inexorably. He held the alien man's gaze, allowing his eyes to glow with power just a bit, causing the man to flinch a bit. "We are well out from your empire, and if it came to a conflict, would have power to a point. And we humans are extremely aggressive when our homes are invaded."

"Could you find a way to destroy Earth? Certainly. I'm not an idiot to speak in absolutes and say we could create a perfect defense. The question is, could you do it before we launch attacks on your home worlds? How many worlds would we destroy in retaliation? War between us would be pyrrhic at best, and serves no purpose but weakening us both."

Again the man made to speak and this time Harry let the man. "That may be, but you're still a single system polity. No matter your achievements in stopping this invasion by the Mad Titan, there will be members of my government who look down on you for that. And there will be many who resent your strong arm tactics."

"Resent, or envy the fact that we are in a position to do so?" Doom asked his tone making the question almost into a statement.

“My helmeted colleague is correct. It seems as if what we call human nature is far more normal throughout the galaxy than anyone would otherwise have thought. But they can resent us all they want, so long as they do not make war upon us,” the American president said firmly.

“And that you pay the reparations demanded as part of this peace agreement,” the French president added, with the Russian and Chinese representatives both grunting in firm agreement. “You were in the wrong, and you must be made to pay. And I would think our letting you and the rest of your fleet live when we could have wiped you all out easily ”

Harry hid a frown at that, as it would not have been the French or United Nations who did that wiping, but his men, Harry and Strange. *That would have been a grim business. I wouldn't do it if they weren't a threat, and with Strange beside me, they wouldn't be. Still, I can't argue with using the threat like this.*

“Resentment can fade. A leader needs to be able to see reality. And at the moment this is yours,” Fin Do Lo said.

The Fleet Admiral argued back for a few moments, refusing to be cowed. But every time he glanced at Harry's way, he seemed to lose the momentum of whatever he was saying. This harmed his attempts to come on strong to the others, and eventually, he was forced to accede as everyone at the table new he had to. Including, the Fleet Overlord himself. As Emma had warned Harry from the start, a lot of this was no doubt going to be re-broadcasted into his fleet for local consumption. And in that light, the Fleet Admiral could not come off as weak.

“*What do you think of his acting then?*” Harry asked mentally, contacting her once more as he had when he ended the time dilation effect on the conference room.

Emma had been joined by Jean, and for a brief second, Harry could see them, Emma allowing him to see through her eyes for a second as the blonde very deliberately nuzzled into the redhead's currently naked breasts, taking delight in one of her semi-downtime moments. Such had been very few and far between since the invasion for everyone at the command level of Avalon Empire, and more so for the Custodes teams.

Yet despite having her head nestled into her lover's chest and thinking extremely carnal thoughts currently, Emma responded quite promptly showing the multitasking ability that had been ingrained in her from a very young age. *“I believe that the majority of his fleet's personnel understand their current position. But I don't know if the Fleet Admiral understands how much resentment there is within that fleet towards not only us, but for the government of his people for how quickly they capitulated to the Mad Titan. I think his acting will play decently well, but all of his officers and sailors know that they were badly overmatched and have to accede to our demands.”*

“Emma's right, but there is also a great deal of fear throughout his fleet,” Jean added. *“I've sent my telepathic powers out towards the fleet subtly several times since the invasion ended, and that is the main impression I've gotten most of the time. We **terrify** the Skrull. A lot of them are just going to be very, very grateful that we're letting them go at all, and will be very vocal against any move against us in the future.”*

Jean hesitated a second then went on. *"A lot of that fear is centered on you Harry. I know you don't like to hear it, but your battle with the Mad Titan across the star system definitely garnered a lot of onlookers. The fact that you killed the being that almost single-handedly forced is..."*

"Almost entirely because of your actions prior to that," Harry interjected quickly. *"I would've had a much harder time of it if Thanos still had access to his throne or his ship. Don't sell your part in that short, Jean."*

Jane could feel Harry meant it, of course, and was also and more than a bit sad at the fact that he was so feared even by an alien society. Yet Jean could also feel Harry's understanding that it actually served their purposes quite well to be so. So she allowed Harry's interruption to go unremarked, simply sending back an affirmative feeling of thanks, and the final thought, *"And I'm also getting the impression Harry that Len'Dok is really telling the truth about wanting to hand over power back into the hands of the civilian government of his people. Mind you, I don't think that what the Skrull think of as a civilian matches what we think of when we use the term considering how many members of that government are also serving officers, but..."*

"But it is still a good sign for his overall trustworthiness, and maybe a sign that the Skrull Empire can really retain its power even after having been conquered by Thanos. Good point. And good for us too, if eventually we can enter a few trade agreements down the line as the others are already talking about now."

The only one at the table who wasn't talking about that kind of thing while Harry was having his mental conversation was Doctor Doom, who had leaned back in his chair and was watching the American, Chinese, British, French and Russian members all talking about normalizing relations between themselves and the Skrull Empire. But the Skrull Empire would not deal with individual polities on a single planet, something Len'Dok was very adamant about. They would deal with humanity as a whole, or not at all.

Deciding that hearing Len'Dok's voice rising for the second time in a row on that point was as good a moment as any to resume taking part in conversation, Harry sent a burst of love and affection down his telepathic link to Jean and Emma, and then leaned forward, saying aloud, "In that case, the Earth Defense Force and the Avalon Empire would be more than willing to serve as a go-between. As you just stated that it was the ability to get into space and colonize that routinely made one power or another more acceptable to the Skrull Empire as a trade partner, correct? Would you be willing to see us as the space-going arm of the umbrella human government, the United Nations?"

The conversation continued for a few more moments on that score, then returned to the peace treaty, with the Admiral agreeing in principle with most of their points quickly, before starting to argue about specific items in the reparations segment. Again Emma proved helpful here, peering into the man's mind and seeing that he was hoping to not only not need to pay too much from his own fleet's stores, but also to seem as if he had brokered as hard and as firmly as he could with the government at home, whatever type of government that might be once his people learned their conqueror was dead.

Although in many ways, to Len'Dok the form of government, who led it or how that came about was immaterial. Len'Dok knew that his people liked scapegoats, and was determined that he would not be

one of them for the Skrull's part in this debacle. *"Which to them, is more about the massive loss of face being defeated like this will entail,"* Emma finished.

Harry could well understand the need to place blame on this kind of utter FUBAR, although he felt that there was already someone perfectly well placed to take the blame for this entire incident, not just launching it in the first place, but organizing the invasion so poorly. Thanos himself. Whatever reports he had about earth, the Mad Titan had vastly underestimated humanity's willingness to fight back, and had run the invasion extremely poorly.

How much of that was arrogance, and how much of that was simple misunderstanding of the human nature or lacking understanding of how many super powered heroes the Custodes could all on, Harry didn't know. But he felt Len'Dok could at least take some solace in the fact that his portion of the invasion had been merely sidelined instead of wiped out to the last sentient.

Because that was what happened in every front on Earth. The Chitauri did not believe in surrendering, and did not believe in being taken prisoner. Several times Jean or one of the others had attempted to take a prisoner, but they always committed suicide somehow. Some hidden circuitries within their cyborg systems flashfried their brains or hearts when they were knocked unconscious or their weapons were taken away for more than a few minutes.

That, and the fact that not a single individual among them had even tried to surrender was disturbing in the extreme. And not just to Harry, but to everyone involved. It had already begun to create rumors among the media that the Chitauri had been some kind of hive mind, mere drones sent into battle by a higher caste or something like that.

But Harry remembered the conversation with Freya and knew that wasn't precisely the case. It was more the fact that the Chitauri were a race of invaders who very clearly understood that if they did not conquer, there was no way home for them, one way or the other. Be it resources or a societal thing like among the Spartans of old, they returned with their shield or not at all.

Eventually the discussion wound down, and the specifics of the wording of the document from the Skrull perspective began. That took another few hours, to the point that most of the leaders in the room began to be a little antsy, and Jean and Emma parted ways back in Camelot. After an intense make out session, anyway. Enough to put a spring to Emma's steps as she went back to work, and Jean went to spend time with her babies.

But eventually they finished the document. The signing however would be official and public, in Fortress Mars. This would be recorded live, broadcasted around the world. Mary Jane and Doctor Doom's fiancé Lourdes had warned that a lot of the countries who had been attacked would probably still not be extremely happy with the Skrull, but most of their anger was apparently centered on the Chitauri. The news that the Mad Titan had conquered the Skrull Empire and forced them to join the invasion had garnered some sympathy in the public. Sympathy that Mary Jane had a whole cavalcade of online operators working to keep growing, and which would be reinforced by signing an official peace treaty.

Len'Dok cut the communication at that point, and the various leaders finished their glasses of wine, stood up, shook hands, and made for the teleportation doorways. A few of them asking to stop in at the Gardens to look around first, which Harry was fine with. They were met at the door into the conference room by Steve and Piotr, who were serving as guides today. Piotr took the Russian and Chinese reps to

look at the gardens, while the French, British and American talked quietly to one another as Steve led them to the teleportation array.

Doctor Doom remained in his seat, still sipping at his wine, and Harry after a round of hand shaking, moved back to the table, sitting across from him, and picking up his own wine glass. The two of them sat in silence for a few moments, and then Doom spoke. "It is always interesting to see how people act when given or having taken great power. You were powerful before, and yet now, you are far more than you once were, far more than human. You're a Titan, just as much as Thanos was. You could have browbeaten nearly everyone here into giving you whatever you wanted. You could have used your Titan Aura to overawe not only the other leaders, but the Fleet Overlord too. You did not."

This was a statement, an observation, not a question. Doom had been around Harry long enough to understand that was not his way of doing things.

Yet Harry still answered. "I think one of the greatest lessons of power that everyone should learn is when not to use it."

Doom snorted at that, then murmured, "And is that why you also haven't made an attempt to take over the world? Given how popular you and the Custodes are, you could do so and many a country would applaud you for it."

"You would not. We would come into direct conflict on that, I'm certain. And while I don't want that kind of direct conflict, I also believe that competition breeds excellence."

"In that at least we are agreed," Doom snorted again, gesturing out to the bulkhead with his wineglass.

Harry paused, staring at the man. "So does that mean that you will start to build your empire in space then?"

"Perhaps. My country is doing quite well at the moment, but if I am to build an empire out there, then I would need both men and material to create it, and good enough advisors to leave in positions of power behind me. That last could be created certainly, but for all the fact that my country has greatly expanded thanks to the Eurasian War, we are still a small population, and with wildly differing educational levels from urban to suburban environments." Doom smiled thinly under his mask. "We will eventually grow, and we will eventually take to the stars, on our own merits. Unlike the French, British and Chinese, who are more than willing to let the EDF do the heavy lifting there, or beg for access, I am practically American in my desire to build my own military presence in space. Would you object?" he asked, almost challenging Harry.

That was a challenge Harry did not take up, simply nodding. "I believe I can trust you not to make the mistakes of so many sci-fi books and allow piracy or some such stupidity to grow if you do create your own space ships, so I have no objections. So long as we keep our Nonaggression treaties of course."

"That has served both of us quite well, and I see no reason to discard at currently." Doom let that caveat sit there between them, knowing his own nature might eventually bring him into direct conflict with Harry, yet finding himself not looking forward to it. The challenge certainly, but the actual battle, no. Harry had been a good ally, even a good... friend, a word that Doom was not used to using, since they had rescued Doom's mother from an eternal damnation. And it was not as if Doom did not have other challenges worthy of his intelligence and drive already.

It was unwilling to admit that however, and quickly change the subject, asking, "And speaking of nonaggression treaties, I could not help but notice that the humans did not take part in repulsing this invasion." He snorted then and made the point that Harry had been thinking about a moment ago, that the invasion had not been run very well.

"Agreed. We didn't really need their help in space, although we could have used some more help on the ground to keep the casualties down. They will face sanctions in terms of trade and getting access to the new colony... although I'm not certain that is the right term, considering it's going to be their new homeland from now on. Regardless, they will not be taking possession of it for quite a bit now."

Doom nodded in approval at that. "If they cannot be bothered to fight for this star system, why should you hand over any segment of it to them?"

Harry refilled Doom's glass from the fire whiskey, noting absently that it had become quite a favorite of the man. "Moving on to other topics, I received the invitation to your wedding today. I understand it will be the event of the season?"

"So Paris tells me. I was more concerned with the historical scope of it. This will be the biggest social event in central Europe in decades," Doom said without a hint of modesty.

"... And I also have been told that you invited Susan, but none of the rest of the Fantastic Four," Harry said, trying hard not to keep a grin from his face.

Doom laughed quietly at that. "While I might have foregone of my direct confrontations with Reed Richards, that is no way saying that I enjoy being around the man. Whereas Susan is quite delightful, and strangely enough, has somehow become a friend to Paris without either of them bringing it to my attention. I merely took advantage of that situation."

Harry laughed at that, reflecting internally that he was also very grateful that the man hadn't asked him to be his best man. That would've been interesting but also awkward in many ways, showing a closeness between them that really for all the fact that they treated one another very respectfully and had several moments like this one, did not truly exist. Instead, Harry knew that Doom's best man was a Latverian, an elderly gentleman who had become the mayor of Latveria's capital and had something of a history with Doctor Doom.

Set for timesharing the whiskey, speaking quietly about the invasion and the social upheavals it had caused. Doom was particularly interested in how it would affect religion going forward, organized religion having taken several blows to the head recently, which many in power in certain religions had not taken well too. Harry was more interested in how it had affected America and France and how they sold their military power.

Eventually however, Ororo and Jean arrived, the two women entering carrying genes children. The children instantly began to reach towards Harry, with Harry feeling a tug on him as if they were trying to pull him out of his chair with magic. "Sorry to interrupt, but the babies wanted their Daddy and unfortunately Harry, you're coming up on your next meeting. So best to get in a bit of toddler time now."

Harry stood up obligingly, and moved towards the women, making faces at the kids, who began to giggle in the way of babies.

Seeing this, Doom stood, bowing grandly toward Ororo and the redheaded woman, saying, "And I do believe that is my signal to leave. Do be dressed appropriately when you come to my wedding, Potter, I know I need not worry about the ladies. I do not want anything to go wrong with it. It would set a bad precedent for the marriage to come."

"Or you could stay around? You might need the practice eventually," Harry tossed back, taking serious into his arms and sitting Rachel on his shoulder, where the baby promptly reached up and grabbed at his hair, cooing in delight.

"That is what Doom Bots are for... Or can be repurposed for anyway," Doom said, exiting the room. Harry at least did him the courtesy of waiting until he was well out of earshot before starting to laugh, shaking his head ruefully.

Scene break

At the same time that the meeting up in Babylon was winding down, members of the Custodes were getting their first time off since prior to the invasion. With access to a world-wide system of near-instant transportation, it was no wonder that the Custodes, X-men, FF and their other allies had spread out in wildly disparate areas. Scott and Rogue had gone to Australia for the surfing. Piotr and Amara had gone to Vietnam, essentially for a several-day trip where they would go by motorcycle and stop to sleep in a magically enlarged tent, stopping wherever they wished to paint whatever scenes they came upon. Others had spread across America and Europe in ones and twos.

Steve and his two girlfriends, a thought that still disturbed him on many levels, had decided to go into DC to take in the sights. Now they were walking down one of the main streets arm in arm, a fact that caused the normally redoubtable Captain America to flush as he wondered what they looked like to anyone watching.

If my mother could see me now, she would tan my hide for being a two-timer. But... well, I do like them both, and they seem to have buried the hatchet somehow. I wish I knew precisely how that happened, but I have no clue. A few months ago they were circling around me like tomcats clawing at one another each time one tried to flirt with me, then a month ago, that disappears and they start working together. Against me most of the time. Ugh. Women. I have to wonder how Harry handles four women at once, and I swear you need to be a telepath to understand them at all!

Betsy squeezed the arm she was holding onto getting Steve's attention. "Look, we're coming up on Capital Hill."

"I know. But so few of the office buildings have been repaired yet, it still looks like a battlefield. I'm just grateful that we're moving people in slowly. It would have been a disaster trying to return the civvies to the city before we have housing for them. To say nothing of cleaning up the bodies," Steve lamented, shaking his head. "I've fought in cities dozens of time in my life, and regardless of the weapons used, its always a bloody affair. I can't argue with the idea of prioritizing places with historical importance, but I wish we could be doing more."

"We've done enough," Carol shook her head wryly. "Lots of resources, hundreds of construction droids... you have seen the protests on them right? How they're taking jobs away from real people?"

As Steve snorted at that, Betsy went on, her crisp British accent a stark contrast to Carol's mellow Midwest. "To say nothing of Potter and the rest of the magicals. Although that's also caused problems. I didn't think there were that many Catholics in France, and the riots in America about how the federal government has 'Fallen to worshipping the magic of the Devil' has been hilarious. Funny how none of those riots actually come close to Washington, or try to show up when Harry's around."

"Can you blame them?" Steve snorted as they came around a pile of rubble and saw the Washington Monument ahead of them. Unlike a significant portion of the city they had been traveling through, the Washington Monument had been magically repaired. It and the Lincoln Memorial were both back to normal, pristine almost. There were a few dozen food carts around, where they came from Steve didn't know, but they were doing a brisk business from the hundreds of American workers working with the construction droids.

There were dozens of other such areas, most of them around the suburbs of the city at other historic sites. With those sites seen to, housing had priority, so the majority of the human effort was in that area. But the men and women here were also clearing out and identifying bodies. The suburbs hadn't seen nearly as heavy fighting as had happened in the center of the city.

The three of them were traveling incognito at the moment, something that Carol ruefully pointed out now, "was a little too easy to pull off. Honestly, Steve, your face should be bringing us a lot of attention if Betsy's isn't. I'm not complaining but do so few people notice the face rather than the outfit?"

"Such is the way of things," Betsy said philosophically. "I personally am not going to quibble."

"And I would say both of you are getting enough attention from the opposite gender regardless," Steve stated, twitching his head towards a crew of construction workers. All of them were staring at Betsy and Carol, their eyes locked on their rears.

"Eh, well, they're just looking. No harm in that." Carol shrugged.

"Right, and it is honestly the same sort of thing Carol mentioned a moment ago. I doubt those men would remember what I looked like beyond maybe the purple hair."

Steve smiled pulling out the arm that Betsy was holding to reach up and play with her purple locks for a moment. "It is quite memorable."

Betsy flushed, reflecting internally that while Steve would never be all that at home in flirting in public, he did have a way with words. "Have there been any more problems with the locals?" She asked in a way to change the subject before Steve became embarrassed again.

The two Americans sighed, with Carol scowling slightly. There had been a lot with the displaced civilians, with gang members and other criminals trying to take advantage of the situation in various ways. It had fallen on the military and regular police to try to keep order. There'd also been a great deal of vandalism, groups of civilians trying to make their own way back into the city stealing from houses, leaving graffiti in places and so forth. "Of course. That kind of thing will continue for a while, I'm certain. But the military and civilian police have done a pretty good job of shutting actual violence down."

"And the fact that the president has declared that this is still a state of emergency until repairs to Washington have been completed and people are being allowed to move back in," Carol reminded the

others. "Until that happens, any civilians making trouble answer to military justice. Without that, it would be illegal for the military police to help the regular police keep order."

Steve nodded reluctantly at that. He wasn't exactly a fan of that, but he understood the necessity. The city was now on the mend, and maybe, just maybe, with the criminal element having caused so much trouble during this upheaval, and so many of them... paying for it, perhaps a lot of the city's problems he'd seen in the news would be gone as well. *A man can dream, can't he?*

Carol saw something red in the sky and turned, watching as the Scarlet Witch flew through a series of burnt outbuildings. As she went a cheer rose from many of the construction workers, and the young woman paused to wave back, looking extremely sheepish to Steve's eyes. She then dumped her present burden, several hundred tons worth of construction material in neat little piles, before rocketing back up into the sky and away.

"Well, we can safely say that the city is on the mend, but it won't be finished anytime soon."

"Any progress is good progress. Paris is worse in a way, because there, the military didn't try to stop people from going home and now they're dealing with a lot of people who are homeless who refuse to leave until their homes are repaired and are demanding food and water. Those riots are a lot more violent too, although there isn't nearly as much gun violence as with the civilians from Washington."

Steve grunted at that, and then asked politely if the two girls wanted anything to eat. They did, and the three of them moved over to one of the nearby food carts, and then moved around the area, getting some looks, but mostly being left alone by the off-duty workers.

Rebuilding and healing was still ongoing, but eventually, the physical wounds at least from the invasion would be healed over. The mental ones, those Steve wasn't so certain about.

Scene break

Repair and humanitarian efforts took nearly a month to complete in Paris, Washington, and Russia. China would take still many months to repair what could be repaired, which did not include the center of the city's hit by a Mandarin's ill-fated nuclear option. But China had agreed to have a celebration for beating off the invasion despite that. This included the Avalon Empire.

Thus nearly a month after the invasion ended Harry and Jean watched the Orbital Drop Marines perform a parade in Fortress Mars's atrium. The two of them stood alongside thousands of others pulled from the savage land and Fortress Mars itself as below them on the floor of the atrium the Orbital Drop Marines conducted a parade.

The Avalon Empire had yet to create a national anthem, and a series of selected songs played as the review continued, starting with a new song from America called 'Hey Brother'. This should've made the parade seem a little strange, but the feelings of this and other songs chosen came across quite well. Jean was not the only person crying in the audience.

There was something very special about this parade, and about all the others going around the world. No effort had been made to fill in the gaps in the units making up those marches.

Here a squad marched with holes in their parade formation, here an entire unit was gone, a gaping hole in the larger formation. Literally swaths of missing men were missing from the formation as their comrades marched on. This was especially true for this particular parade.

The Orbital Drop Marines had been the tip of the spear of the human reaction to the invasion, and that spear tip had been badly blunted. In Washington, two out of every five Oh Damn who took part in the battle had died, and their command structure in particular taken a pounding. In Paris, the casualties had been even worse. Three out of every five Orbital Drop Marines involved in that battle had died, with the other two being wounded in some fashion. By the time the order to pull out and let the French take over entirely, the surviving Oh Damns had been down to less than a platoon from the starting size of three companies.

This performance hadn't been Harry's idea. He had thought the pain of the losses was still too raw to allow something like this. But Sam, Steve, and many of the commanders the world over had liked the idea when Sean had thought it up. Numbers were just that, dry, anecdotal. Stories and tales were closer, but there was almost something visceral in seeing a parade like this with missing men and women. It made the losses far more real.

The response that Harry was getting from Mary Jane and others who were watching the impact this is having on the local civilian populations was mixed obviously, but generally extremely positive. Most particularly in America, where the parade had occurred the day before. Time zones were a thing, after all.

The normal American's view of the military had shifted quite drastically since the days of Steve Rogers and World War II. The Korean War had started it, a war that America could not say it really won, but had merely tied. Then came the Cold War, the peace movement and Vietnam, the Cuban missile crisis and so forth, eroding the feelings of patriotism equaling support of the troops in America.

This was no longer the case at least for the vast majority of Americans. America had been invaded on their own soil, in their own capital for the first time since the era of sail. And although they needed help, the American military had not been found wanting. Now they saw the cost that their soldiers had paid, and it was leaving an impression. There was a great deal of pride, but also grim determination to never let something like this ever happen, and to support their troops to make it so.

China had needed to rebuild not only a lot of its cities and infrastructure, but also its pride in itself, which had taken a distinct pounding both in the manner of their invasion, and how their leader had reacted to it. Not so much their military strength, but their society as a whole. The entire edifice had taken a monstrous pounding, and in particular how the central government had responded to the alien invaders.

They had since found that. Their parades did not consist of just military personnel, but emergency responders and even doctors nurses and other medical personnel. It made for a much stranger, and much longer series of parades, but Dennis was extremely upbeat about what it. He gleefully pointed to the strange lack of CCP colors throughout the parade and what that could mean for the future, as well as how much the Chinese had taken to thanking the Avalon Empire and the Asgardians for their help. Indeed, several Asgardians had been invited by name to view the parade in Beijing.

The social upheaval there would continue but perhaps in a positive direction.

Russia once more was different. Being invaded and throwing those invaders out was something central to how Russians saw themselves, an us against them and we cannot lose type of outlook. This had been proven once again. They had been invaded, and turned the invaders aside. There, the Russians were not so pleased about needing to admit they needed help, but neither could they argue that they had gotten some. More importantly, they too had regained their pride in themselves as a nation, not just the military side of things, but as a people, something which had been severely stomped on upon during the Eurasian War and how they had been dupes of the Dire Wraiths.

While the French thoughts on the military hadn't changed overmuch, how France was seen as a military power the world over had changed drastically in the days after World War II. Thanks to how they have been forced to surrender to the Nazis so quickly a lot of the public around the world thought of the French as weak, as people who would rather surrender than fight.

Any true historian knew that was so much hogwash, but that had been the impression. No longer.

Paris had been reclaimed almost entirely by French hands, and they had even demanded that the last of the Orbital Drop Marines retreat (those who hadn't been medically evacuated) and that Ben Grimm and the rest of the Custodes on hand leave the city. Ben and the others argue, but with the portals all closed, they had agreed that house to house clearing could be left to the French. And they had paid for it, but the French had been the ones to liberate Paris yet again... if with help once more.

And that was only the major parades, the ones happening in the cities which had been the center of the invasion, and which had suffered so tremendously. Harry wasn't really certain if Debreceen should be among that number, considering that Doctor Dooms prisoner, Gamora, who he had talked to several times at this point, and who would be remaining the Doctor's guest for quite some time to come, had treated the city and its civilians with such kid gloves.

Regardless, there was a parade there too, along with one in India, Burma, Bangladesh, Germany, etc., etc. Every nation who had sent men off to war was having a parade today, or the local equivalent of today. Time zones were a thing, after all.

Harry had sent representatives to each and every parade going on. Hela went to China along with Danielle and Skadi. Colossus, Amara and Thunderbird went to Russia, Ben Grimm, and the Fantastic Four to Paris and so forth. Even Wendy, the leader of the snatchers had gone. Kitty Pryde and her parents had joined Ororo in India. Harry and Jean would join them presently, and was already looking forward to Jean, Emma and himself joining them there in India and exploring the subcontinent for a few days with the Prydes, whose family atmosphere Harry always enjoyed just as much as being around Melody and the kids.

Hela may or may not join them, as she was going to spend time with her family. A family whose patriarch and matriarch Harry had met in the physical world with their own minds this time, for the first time barely three days ago when Loki had woken up.

Flashback:

Harry stood outside the same cage that Loki had been occupying ever since Danielle had delivered his wife's soul into his body, wondering idly how this was going to go. "I know you're awake Loki. We have

numerous sensors which are telling us that you are so, please don't insult our intelligence by trying to play dead or something."

It was not Loki's voice which answered first. Instead it was a female voice coming from his mouth, a strong alto. "You'll have to forgive my husband," that voice said, adding a possessive tone to that word that Harry had to smile at even as he wondered if this was some kind of trick. "Trickery and deceit come easily to him, especially when he is in a cage, cornered as he is now. And more especially when he must admit his faults to others. That oddly is something he has in common with all too many people, man and woman alike, regardless of race."

"Some of that sounded good, but who exactly am I speaking to right now?"

"That Sigyn's voice, precisely the same tone heard in my mind when I commune with her," Dani said.

She, Fenrir and Hela were also there, although the rest of the high command were still busy elsewhere on other projects. Steve, for example, was meeting with the Winter Soldier, and speaking to Charles about how to help Bucky Barnes through the indoctrination he had been put through. Ororo was meeting with various teachers in the Savage Lands to talk about yet another request to enlarge the school structure there.

Work continued on, even with family drama like this in the making.

"That is well and good, but do we know if this is really Sigyn? Has she taken over Loki's body then?" Fenrir growled.

"We're actually cohabitating in the strangest use of the term that has probably ever been," Loki said, his own voice now rather than that of his wife. "It is actually quite crowded in here, and not at all pleasant. I feel somewhat bloated. A feeling that I have not felt since I lost a wager and had to turn into a female horse for shall we say..."

"Ah yes, Father, thank you, I believe we are all familiar with that particular tale. Although many of us still wonder why Sleipnir was not resurrected and used in the Shadow's games like so many of us," Hela said sadly. "Thanks to the Shadows messing with my mind even more thoroughly than most of our people, I have very few memories of him I can trust, but those few I do have are pleasant, and I would have liked to get to know Sleipnir more."

"... Yes, well, while I had put plans in motion to save my wife, there was a limit to how many such plans I could make. Especially in your case as you were still holed up in Niflheim and did not take part in the final battle. Indeed to the best of my knowledge, you should not have been a part of the agreement at all. Your service to Death should have kept the Shadows from effecting you, but I suppose that the Shadow Scum were able to do so because Niflheim is such an intrinsic part of the Yggdrasil system," Loki answered with a shake of her head.

"So it is not just the fact that you have your wife's soul within your body, but we are expected to believe that your memories have returned entirely to you? This seems too good to be true," Hela scowled, although internally she was doing flips. Dani had mentioned her thoughts on the items in Sigyn's loghouse being symbols of Loki's memories, but until now, Hela hadn't held out hope those memories would also return when Sigyn's soul came into contact with Loki's.

At that, Loki finally stood up from where he had been slumping in his bed, moving towards the bars which he gripped, staring through them at Harry then around at Fenrir, Hela and Danielle. His lips quirked, as if he was fighting the urge to make a snarky comment.

He didn't, and instead shook his head. "Given how much power I can sense coming off of you Harry Potter, I would be a fool to try and tangle with you physically. I made a deal with one Titan and I reckon my survival of that is a very good thing, and can mostly be laid at your feet I am almost certain. Of course, we don't get news in here, so I cannot be entirely certain but..."

Loki's voice suddenly shifted, as did his entire stance, becoming almost feminine despite the fact he was a man and still wearing the clothing he had been caught in. "Enough, husband. You have more important things to do than to let you try and convince everyone that you are far smarter and wiser than you truly are. Save such things for later. I wish to return to my body first. Harry Potter Danielle once carried a weapon made by my hand in my realm within her body, and I like to think I gave her good advice. And now I am going to give you some. A single body cannot hold two souls, no matter how malleable those souls may be for very long. Especially souls of such power as my husband and I. Take us to my body, so that the stasis upon it can be removed, and I can be back home within or else I am rather afraid magical mishaps will occur."

Harry frowned a bit, looking over at Hela. "Do we trust him?"

"Trust but verify. I believe that is my mother speaking just now, and I believe that was my erstwhile father a moment ago. I would prefer something else from both of them to know that he is truly his own man again before we release him from this cage, and some means of magically making certain that he cannot somehow escape," Hela answered, with Fenrir growling in agreement.

Loki looked at her, and his body tone changed again, becoming masculine once more. Loki then took several steps back away from the cage doors, and bowed his head towards her, even sweeping his hand along the floor in a courtly manner. "My dear daughter, I am sorry for how I treat you. I am sorry for failing you and your brothers, and I am sorry that I insulted you as I did while under the influence of the last vestiges of the Shadows. My wife has told me as much as she could about the war in Asgard against their influence, and I could wish that I had been there to take part in some measure. I was not, and although I can blame that on the Shadows influencing my personality, I think even that would ring hollow. Please, accept my forgiveness, and know that even if you do not ever acknowledge me as your father in the future, I am proud of the woman you have become."

For a moment, no one spoke, simply looking at Hela, and then she finally nodded. "Some kind of anti-magic inhibitor on him Harry, I still would not like him to try and run off. But I do not believe he will any longer. It seems as if my mother is a very good influence on him."

"I try to be, but inside his body like this, my abilities to do so are quite more limited than I would like," Sigyn stated, as Loki's body language once more shifted.

Harry let Loki out of the cage, and then led him to where they had moved the coffin encased body of his wife. Harry was in no way willing to take Loki into Camelot for this, after all.

When it came down to it, it was almost anti-climactic from Harry's perspective how easily Loki removed the crystal containing his wife. He simply leaned down, pressing his forehead into it, and breathing out

slowly. His breath became almost blue-white for a moment engulfing the crystal. And then the crystal shattered, leaving Sigyn's body laying there immaculate.

Almost instantly however, Sigyn's body began to collapse, but Loki was already moving. He leaned down, kissing the comatose form of his wife.

Once more there was a tremendous thrum in the air, a feeling of weight as Loki's body lit up. Then an image of Sigyn's form overlapped his, before becoming drawn into her body. It was not a fast process, and the magic continue to ebb and flow as the image slowly let Loki's body and shifted into her physical body.

But eventually, several hours after they had started, Sigyn's eyes opened. Her hand rose up, clasping the back of Loki's head as all Loki's energy seemed to leave him. She caught him, slowly rolling and setting him down to the side on the table her crystal coffin had been sitting on. "That..." she rasped, her voice hoarse with disuse, "That was not an experience I would ever willingly go through again."

"M, mother?" Hela asked tremulously, almost sounding like a little girl. "Is that really you?"

Beside her, Fenrir also looked on in shock and no small amount of longing. Like Hela, his memories had been twisted, erased and changed by Those Who Watch Above in Shadow. But he still had some few memories of this woman, her scent in particular one that, even through the Shadows' deprivations, he associated with safety and warmth.

"It is indeed and with a physical body once more. Ugh, I feel weak as a week old kitten, but it is indeed I." Sigyn made to sit up, only to fall back, what strength she'd used to roll her husband to lay beside her leaving the woman. Hela quickly moved forward, helping her to stand up, as Harry followed, calling for some food.

Later, the two godlings ate voraciously as Hela and Fenrir sat nearby, plying them with questions. Both of them had their full memories from the time before the Shadows came. Hela ate it up, acting more like a young woman rather than the determined queen of Niflheim Harry had gotten to know. Not that he didn't like this version, of course. Fenrir too had lost much of his wild edge, and his traitorous tail was wagging so wildly it was all Harry could do to not point it out and laugh at the change that had come over the young wolf.

All of this had settled Harry's concerns about Loki trying to pull some trick. He wasn't certain what to do with him at this point, but he was at least certain the Trickster God wasn't going to be their enemy anytime soon.

"So were you able to get your transformation powers back when you undid the crystal?" Harry asked during a lull in the conversation.

"Alas, Titan, no I will not." Loki had taken to addressing Harry like that for some reason. Harry was uncertain if it was a dig or a compliment, and knew that very uncertainty was probably part of the reason why Loki was doing it. He seemed to delight in such speech, even when imparting tales from his family's past. "Once used to power such a enchantment, a deific power is used up, never to return." Loki smiled then, taking Sigyn's hand in his own. "Yet I would do it all over again if I had to in order to save my wife."

Sigyn smiled at that, doing so in such a way that Harry thought of her appellation 'the Victorious Wife' once more. Then Loki turned to him, and Harry felt a frisson of concern going down his spine despite his new Titan form. "And speaking of family. What are your intentions towards our daughter, Harry Potter?"

End flashback

The music in the background changed, bringing Harry back to the here and now. He shook his head, staring down at the marching ODMs, hearing the faint shouts and cheers, as well as the subdued crying coming from too many wives and children whose fathers would never come home again. As he did, Harry fell to brooding about the nature of arrogance, of both Thanos's and Harry's own. *If I had only figured out the Titan Ritual earlier, if only I had gone through it the moment Strange and I were finished going over it, then I could have...*

"Stop that," Jean practically hissed angrily into his hear, jerking Harry out of his thoughts once more. "Harry, don't beat yourself up on what ifs, and don't you dare denigrate the sacrifice of these men by thinking their sacrifice was meaningless! You made mistakes, yes, but putting your trust in the Custodes and the ODMs was not one of them. It was war, and in war people die. If I'm not allowed to beat myself up about not stopping the Mandarin from launching those nukes, like you, Hela, Ororo and even Emma told me I couldn't this morning for the fortieth time at least, you can't beat yourself up about not being omnipotent, alright?"

"No... not alright," Harry said shaking his head although he was smiling somewhat crookedly at his redheaded wife as he said it, so she didn't grab his danglies in a telekinetic death grip. "But I will try to remember that, my love."

With that, Harry put his arm around her, ruffling Rachel's hair as he did, taking Sirius in his hands. The boy, who had been looking restless, calmed down, grabbing at Harry's brightly colored handkerchief from the breast pocket in his suit, pulling it out and biting toothlessly onto it.

Harry chuckled at that, gently rocking the boy as he turned his attention to his troops once more, thinking about the future.

Scene break

"Hmmm..." Harry murmured, leaning back in his office in the Magical Minds headquarters as he stared down at some of the paperwork in front of him. This is not actually Magical Minds paperwork, no for this paperwork Harry was wearing his Imperial hat as he liked to call it, that as head of the Avalon Empire and the commander-in-chief of the Earth Defense force. Because these papers were official requests from America for access to space. Not to enlarge their base on Fortress Mars, which they were already in the process of selling back to the EDF because they simply could not truly make use of it in a meaningful way outside of training their infantry in zero-g. Something that was of very limited utility. No, this form was a request to buy access time to his technology so the US could build their own space station.

And not just a space station, but a construction yard. The Americans wants to build their own space fleet. But they want to do so by having me to build it for them. A part of me admires their... What is that Jewish word that Ben used recently, chutzpah? Yes that's it. And another

part of me admires the fact that they want to be in a position to defend themselves. But this is just not going to happen.

Eventually, Harry felt the Earth Defense Force would transform into a space-going arm of the United Nations, with himself remaining as commander but the rest of the world's governments funding it in different ways. To a large extent the various smaller polities like the European Union and the SARU South American Resource Union were already doing so if in an informal manner. With China signing on to the Asian one, the Asiatic Conglomerate would undoubtedly join them in doing so. But letting the various governments have their own space-based militaries was just not going to happen.

I respect the American military more than any of the others, even Britain's. They're truly the best in large scale fleet maneuvers, keeping large fleets maintained, the logistics side of things, and training. But much like everyone else, the Americans have personal axes to grind with their fellow nations. And more importantly, the other nations would look at that idea with various levels of horror. China, France and Russia in particular, who just happen to slowly creeping up on how much aid they're giving the EDF.

They can send more men to join the Earth Defense Force, and the ODMs. Both of them are in need of a lot more men. The OH Damns are still at barely company level strength, and the next batch of recruits won't be ready for another three months. And with our plans going forward with the first human built starships, well that's going to open up a lot of jobs and a lot of slots in the military side of things.

Briefly writing out a polite if firm rejection letter to the request from the Americans, Harry turned his mind back to those plans. The idea of creating a human fleet in space wasn't exactly a new one. Reed, Carol, and a large majority of her think tank had been busily working on designs for some time. But with Forge taking charge and pushing forward on the engineering side of things, and the Long Voyager to use as an example of what was possible, those plans had been rocketing forward. Indeed, the construction yard to build the ships in question was almost finished construction over Fortress Mars.

The idea was to pair the concept of the Ravens with a capital ship able defend itself. This, plus the examples of the Kree and Skrull superdreadnoughts had pushed Forge and Reed to design an equivalent of a supercarrier-dreadnought hybrid. It would be built to launch fighters at extended ranges and also to fight at long range on it's own, while taking one hell of a pounding. The ship also had onboard repair capabilities.

Forge and Reed both understood that humanity would never be able to match the quantity of any enemy fleet they tangled with. Therefore they had to **grossly** exceed the quality. Survivability was also a major priority. Thankfully they had access to Harry's magic, or rather Kitty's runic arrays, since Ororo's young apprentice had basically moved into Fortress Mars along with Polaris at this point. So despite the numerous objectives the hybrid ships needed to meet, humanity could indeed make ships that were the equivalent of four or five of their enemies.

And once we have a fleet of our own here in Sol, we can release our existing fleet, the ones which we basically stole from the Kree, for diplomatic and survey missions. I know Reed wants one personally, and I'm actually inclined to give it to him given some of the things I can understand about his experiments in light refraction, faster than light communication over galactic distances, and the impact on various chemical and metallurgical products when done in Zero G.

He's not the only one though, and I know Carol said something about being embarrassed recently on a date with Steve when some scientist or other came up and literally begged on hands and knees for a chance to explore space beyond the solar system. That must've been quite a sight.

Looking at the 3D image of the supercarrier Harry's fingers began to flash on a control panel, the image shifting under his command before noting some interesting features, and some areas where he had questions, the fingers of his other hand typing away a message, showing a level of multitasking that he had not previously had before his Titan Form transformation.

The fact it was also four in the morning and he had left Jean, Ororo and Emma all comatose from a night of lovemaking was also a sign of the sheer vitality that being a Titan gave him. Harry had also discovered he was able to speed read far, far faster than even Hermione at her best had ever been able to. His typing speed also exceeded his computer's ability to keep up with, and he'd been forced to have specially reinforced one built.

For once, Harry was actually dealing with more of the paperwork and the organizational aspect than even Sage.

The mutant with the super computer for a brain had instantly noticed this. She had then quite cheerfully told him she was going on vacation. Told him, not informed her employer, in a tone that told Harry that trying to argue would've been a very bad idea.

But Harry wasn't going to do so in any event even if he knew that he couldn't handle her workload. Of everyone who worked behind the scenes, Sage and Sir Dennis were the two who were the most indispensable to the rise of the Avalon Empire. Frankly, if Sage had told him that she wanted a small minor planet for herself, complete with beaches, sun, and nude serving boys, Harry would have moved heaven and earth to get it for her.

Similarly, Dennis was going to be passing on his spymaster position to Mystique for now. He would remain as the Asian liaison, which had always been his particular bailiwick, and he would still be in charge of recruiting. But Mystique would be taking over running the overall organization. An organization they still had no specific name for, something that Harry had left cheerfully blank for now.

For a moment, Harry stopped in his work, his hands once more becoming visible to the normal human eye as they stopped typing and he stared at nothing for a moment, thinking about how far they had come. Earth was now protected against further alien invasion, humanity was more

united, and the mutant issue was no longer uppermost in everyone's minds. That, perhaps more even than defending earth against several alien invasions was something Harry was extremely proud of. Of course, there were bigots still on both sides, but after the invasion, after the Eurasian war, after the numerous times the Custodes Mundi helped defend the planet, the only real area where mutants were still seen as a major social issue was in the Middle East. That quagmire Harry knew would take decades, centuries, perhaps, to figure out, let alone to try and change. *But, perhaps in the near future, I'll have time to devote to it.*

Harry shook his head and looked back to his screen noticing the PC had caught up with his typing again. But before he could get back to work, Mary Jane poked her head in, and then sighed, shook her head and pushed the door open. A moment later the redhead strode inside with the confidence and poise that Harry knew Ororo and Emma took great delight in seeing in the young redhead from New York. The fact that she was wearing an extremely formal dress, however, was what caused Harry to blink.

"I knew it! I knew you would forget the time once you got into work, boss. I don't care how much you can do or how fast, there's always going to be something more to grab your attention. But not today!" Mary Jane said, tapping her watch meaningfully. "You have some place to be, remember? Heck, all of us have some place to be."

Harry blinked again, then turned to look at the clock, before rising and moving over the desk so fast that Mary Jane lost track of him for a second. He took her hand gently, and said simply, "You're right. We do need to get a move on. I'll take us right to the portal in Australia. Ororo and the others should be ready to head through to meet with Hela soon, so you can join them there. And don't worry," he said, his lips corking into a wry smile. "Despite the fact that this is going to be my fourth wedding, I know all too well how not to offend my wife to be."

Scene break

"And you still won't remove the mask?" Ororo asked, her tone teasing as she held Hela's hair up for Jean. "And if I did not know you were a goddess, sister, I would be most jealous of your hair as I know you do barely anything with it normally unless one of us is in the baths with you."

"Hah, that just shows that I am good at understanding how to take advantage of the kindness of others," Hela answered, humming in delight at the dual feelings of Ororo's fingers through her hair and MJ and Kitty giving her a last minute manicure. "And no, I will not remove my mask until my Seidr Man and I officially go to bed together as man and wife."

MJ and Kitty had declared her nails unworthy of the rest of current outfit when they had joined the rest of the women in their current boudoir. Said boudoir was part of the halls of Hel, Hela's home in Niflheim. The actual ceremony would be happening in Valhalla, but given how easy it was to transport from one dimension to another here in the boughs of Yggdrasil, there was no reason to stay in Asgard until right before the ceremony began.

A ceremony that Hela had hoped to see for months, a ceremony she yearned for after helping her sisters-in-love through their own: a wedding. A wedding, moreover, where Odin would be officiating, and her parents (her parents! A thought she still had trouble believing was real) would also be there. *The Mandela's, I thought I would remain a spinster for decades more. If Santos was still alive, I might be tempted to send them a thank you basket. It would be loaded with a mixture of poison and enchantments designed to make his life both short and uncomfortable, but I might still be tempted to send it in the first place.*

Hela currently wore a traditional Norse wedding dress, red blouse and skirt paired with white sleeves. Along her neckline and the sleeves there were immensely intricate stitching. Her mask was now white as well, contrasting only slightly to her skin. Hela wore only one piece of jewelry, the a single necklace of silver and bronze.

Ororo was dressed similarly, except she was all in white, which offset her rich black skin to magnificent effect. Jean and Emma had opted to dress in more normal modern day dresses, but as chief bridesmaid, Ororo had agreed to follow the trend of the wedding, and the deep crimson color of the dress stood out strongly on her skin. Thankfully, having women involved in the wedding had been somewhat easy to add in as having bridesmaids at all was the only aspect of modern-day weddings that Hela had kept while they were designing the ceremony.

“Nervous?” Jean asked, leaning down to give Hela a kiss on her collarbone, causing Hela to both smile and gently push the redhead away, for propriety’s sake, although the sentiment was very appreciated. “It was just the hormones for my pregnancy talking, but I would sure as hell was nervous walking down that aisle. Nervous so much about Harry, or our relationship or anything like that, hell, we’ve been living in the same set of rooms for months by that point. About the whole ceremony, all those people looking at me...”

“For my part, I did not feel nervous about the ceremony. The whole idea of actually being married was... Disturbing a little. For so long I had been trained to think of the company first, the family’s money first, and then myself and my happiness, the very idea of actually being able to marry someone who I generally liked was a strange one to me. I enjoyed it, quite a lot, when it came to it. But leading up to the wedding, that was a strange time for me,” Emma admitted.

The blonde woman was leaning against the door jamb, having arrived with several bottles of her family’s best wine and spirits, and had been starkly trading barbs with Hela up to this point. But now Emma smiled faintly at Hela. “I don’t think you have that kind of baggage. And, although I will deny I ever said this to anyone bar Harry if any of you mention in public, I think I am looking forward to calling you a sister wife Hela.”

Hela smiled at that, nodding her head towards Emma. The two of them still had their little moments, but generally speaking, they’d grown to love and cherish one another, just as Hela had Ororo and Jean. Now Hela looked up at Ororo, one eyebrow rising under her mask as she asked the woman who was easily the central not woman in the relationship, “and you? Were

you nervous? I have to admit that I was somewhat nervous for my part in your wedding, I'd never officiated one before after all."

Ororo laughed quietly shaking her head. "When I was young and on the Serengeti plains, I officiated several weddings and nearby tribes. It's not my business on that score. I was... Ambivalent about making my wedding a political statement, although I was right on board for making it a social one if that makes any sense. Regardless, I believe that you will perform magnificently my dear, just as you did on that day, so if you needed reassurance there you are."

Snorting at that, Hela leaned further back in her chair, letting Mary Jane and Cordelia do her nails. The moment was ruined however when Emma said, "Hah! Hela is not feeling nervous, she's horny as hell! Can you imagine how any of us would've been if we'd been forced to flirt and just take things so slowly for months? Frankly I'm surprised she's not ruining that little dress of hers right now with..."

Thankfully, Ororo had finished holding up Hela's hair by the sport, and a quick silencing spell halted Emma's words in place. The laughter from all of the other women however, caused Hela to blush Rosalie behind her mask. She did not, however, gainsay Emma's words.

About a hour later, the wedding bride's party departed from Hel, with Hela's faithful wolf beside them. Garm walked us along beside her, his wounds during the battle with Santos having long since healed. Hela gently rested one hand on top of his head, and the two of them moved towards the door. There, Hela met with Fenrir, Loki and her mother. Occasionally Hela still had trouble calling Loki father, yet she was slowly getting used to the idea. She exchanged hand clasps with him, and a brief but heartfelt hug with Sigyn, whose eyes gleamed with pride.

"I could wish we could've waited a bit longer for me to measure the true metal of your man," Loki grumbled, shaking his head as Hela and Sigyn exchanged hugs and cheek kisses. "This haste is unseemly."

"I have been waiting for this for months, and if you did not think that I would be taking advantage of your presence here as quickly as possible, you are a mad man," Hela said, despite the fact that this gave Emma a perfect opportunity to say the dreaded words of 'I told you so!' Behind her.

Sigyn joined the laughter that occurred then, but Loki did not, sadly shaking his head and looking at his daughter. "You're certain this is what you want? I realize that I am not decidedly not in a position to tell you what to do, I just wish to be certain that you are certain in your own mind. You have never struck me as the type to share, and now you are entering into a..."

'Relationship with not one man, but one man and three other women. We are not a traditional harem, we are a multi-relationship father. Harry might be the center of it,' *along with Ororo*, Hela added mentally. "But we are all equals. Yes, I will have to share his time, his affections. But I have had months to get used to that, as well as to fall in love with the other ladies." She turned and gave Emma Jean and Ororo such a look that had two of the three blushing, and Ororo

simply chuckling quietly, looking back at her, a certain eagerness in her own eyes that said Hela's pulse to racing. Turning back, she gave Loki a faint smile. "I thank you for being concerned about my welfare, but I am a grown woman, and I know my mind. This is what I want."

Loki stared back at her, then shrugged, and gestured with his head towards the door. If he was feeling any further regrets, or perhaps anger at the fact that he would have so little time to get to know her before she turned from his daughter into someone else's wife, he did not mention it. "In that case, Garm, Fenrir, if you would do the honors?"

Of the two siblings, Fenrir still have the most issues with their father, although he followed Sigyn around like a lost puppy quite often. But this was one order that Fenrir had no trouble obeying. He and Garm moved towards the door's leading into Valhalla, and muscle them open with their heads and shoulders.

As they did, the cacophonous noise of men and women chattering to one another faded, and the drumbeat began. Those who had been standing around the area quickly moved, forming two square blocks. No one sat, instead they stood, peering over one another's heads towards the incoming family of Loki and Sigyn as they moved forward. The hall had been cleaned from top to bottom, and now, as the ceremony began, the normal torches changed color. Instead of the normal flame, they became almost white, like tiny stars lit the hallway from one end to another, giving everything a ethereal almost a moonlit cast.

Lining the way were the rest of the as guardians, along with many of the chosen Asatru. All were dressed in their finest clothing, with Freya in particular looking exceedingly happy and dressed to kill as she stood to one side of Danielle, with Skadi on the young woman's other side. Whatever they been talking about head once more put a blush on the younger twosome's faces, and a smug smile on Freya's. Baldur crossed from his mother with his brother Thor, both of whom looked warily on Loki. Thor was looking at Loki that way because he thought Loki was a danger to himself or any of the others, rather, since Loki had been allowed to interact with the as guardians once more, Loki had taken to cranking Thor and Odin both as often as he could get away with it. "One of my chief duties as the trickster God is to poke fun and deflate egos, and what better target for such things is there than the fund and Lord Odin, God of Kings?" He would often say. The fact that this was his way of bonding with the rest of his estranged family was somewhat lost on Thor when he was dealing with his clothing being turned into address, and his beard, which had finally begun to grow in once more, trying to crawl up his face and blind him. Balder on the other hand had simply not quite yet reconciled the reality of Loki's position within the royal family of Asgard and the one that the shadows had embedded into all of their minds. There was still a large part of his mind that was seeing his estranged half-brother, rather than estranged uncle. Even if balder did enjoy Loki's sense of humor.

Among the as guardians of course were much of the rest of the world guard, but they were not alone. Peter sat boat behind Melody and several of the kids, those who Hela was particularly close with. Father Garnoff sat with Rahne, the wolf girl having a complicated expression on her

face while the Russian Orthodox priest was simply taking everything in, not judging anything or doing anything. There were even a few house elves sitting around the kids, and although a few of them were exchanging glares with several of the Alfar who served Odin, two of them were holding the babies, who were also surprisingly taking it all in. Or it would've been surprising as most babies would not react well to the tumbled and the strange atmosphere. These two however, merely had small minor silencing spells on them to keep the noise level hitting them down, and seemed to be doing quite well in Sigyn's perspective, and she took a special moment to wave at her pseudo-grandchildren, getting a wave from little Rachel in turn.

While Loki made a point of maintaining eye contact with both of his nephews, and then winking at them, Hela had no eyes whatsoever for the rest of the crowd. No, her eyes were locked in an emerald gaze, and her heart was once again attempting to do 100 m dash.

Harry stood decked out in his own traditional wedding outfit, and it truly showed what a change during his Titan transformation, his height and his breadth of shoulder. Yet that was only part of it. Now, it was the love, the welcome and raw desire that Hela saw in those eyes that her breath away. Oh yes, Mama, my Seidr Man, mine, mine! This is not decidedly the man that I want.

For his part, Harry was utterly stunned. While it Hela's outfit was nowhere near as sensual and some of the dresses she had worn on their dates previously, the severity of it merely highlighted her uniqueness in a way that those dresses had not. The warmth in her tiny smile, the way her eyes caught his behind her mask, her hair, her face, the way she strode, commanding, no, demanding attention like a queen of all she surveyed, all of it caused Harry's mouth to go dry, and his heart to decide that today was a day to imitate a Formula 500 car. I would think something like God is blessed, but that would be far too on point at the moment, a small part of his mind thought, the rest of his mind lost in the moment, and what it entailed for the future.

Just robotically he held out her hand to her, finally being able to throw off the spell her arrival and put on him as she touched his hand with her own, linking fingers before they turned to look at Odin who, as he had said he would, was presiding over the affair.

For an endless moment, the two of them stared into one another's eyes, lost in their mutual emotions. Then, as one, they turned to Lord Odin, and the ceremony began, binding the last of Harry's wives to him in holy matrimony.

There were other challenges to come. Other enemies to fight. But from now until the end of days, Harry would not face them alone. He would always have his wives by his side, come what may, the foundation of what they had all built together. And for now, that was enough.

FIN

you have it folks. The end of the third path to the future. If I'm not mistaken, this is one of the longest stories on this site, and it is certainly by far the longest of my stories up to this point. I... Am of two minds about it. I think in many ways, it shows some of the mistakes I made early on in my writing, and in particular, it shows the folly of attempting to world build to such a degree

in such a chaotic setting. I truly, truly should have done a much better job of narrowing the focus, and of timing each bark out. But we live and learn, and right now, this is the best place to stop this story. My Marvel muse is so sated, it is going into hibernation mode, and will not be roused for good long while. Perhaps ever, considering I don't exactly like where the comic books have gone since even before the first Civil War. Maybe I could be talked into coming back into this universe and simply using the Marvel movies as a bedrock, but even that is doubtful, again considering the latest stuff from Marvel is so spectacularly awful.

Remember the final version! I will be undoubtedly writing rewriting large portions of this once Observance03 gets it back to me, and that will undoubtedly take a long while considering he is now to chapters behind. I will probably also be rewriting large portions of the invasion arc itself, so that events are shown happening concurrently rather than by theater. Writing them by theater was a good way to write them, but looking back it isn't so good a way to actually read them. But doing so now before he has a chance to look at them would be silly since I could just do it at the same time.