

Chapter 86 -

I had absolutely no idea how Natasha managed to sit on the bridge for six fucking hours. For anyone else, I would have assumed they had a secret book or something tucked away in a pocket or something like that, but her uniform was way too form-fitting for that. She must have found *something* to entertain herself though because I was about twenty minutes in and I was already going stir crazy.

I don't remember ever being like this before I got sent here. The Conceptual Deck was clearly turning me into an impatient workaholic.

Eventually, I gave up doing nothing and pushed out my cabinet of tricks and pulled out a notepad and pen that was stuck to the inside of the door, flipping through to find my list of unimportant things to do. It was a secondary list that Ema kept updated for me of things that would be nice, but wasn't really important enough to set aside time to do. Basically, it was a list of busy work.

I went through the list and spotted something that I had just had a problem with. It was a smaller project, or at least it should be, and I would be able to mostly stay on the bridge and keep an eye on the sensors and the view screens while I was working on it. Before I could get past that thought I frowned, reaching into my cabinet of tricks to pull out another notebook. On the cover I wrote "ship improvements" then opened to the front page and wrote "interior, unsecure travel points" and "viewscreen/bridge access in the workshop." I paused for a moment, crossed out the last word, and wrote "High population areas" before adding "separate workshop" on a separate line. I closed the notepad and dropped it onto one of the crew stations before turning back to my cabinet.

I looked through it for a moment before pulling out two sets of each of my scanner types, the universal scanners, the medical scanner, and the LPM scanner. Knowing I had plenty of spares in the cabinet, and access to a UCM, I started out by combining one of each together. The result was a much more comprehensive universal scanner, one that seemed to be capable of much more detail, including medical information and technical data, all while maintaining the more game-like descriptions and information the universal scanner had. It was helpful for sure, but the process had pulled the LPM scanner too far from what was quickly becoming my production network. I tried adding in another LPM scanner, but not only was that not enough to pull it back into the network of scans my LPMs had access to, but it was also starting to affect what the new scanner was capable of.

It seemed like they were just going to have to stay separate.

Shrugging off the set back I sat down in the pilot's chair, and quickly checked the sensor before pulling out my pocket knife. I turned it up to its highest setting, which subsequently was

also when the blade was at its weakest. I deployed my armor around myself before slowly, and carefully, cutting the armor around my right forearm off. Luckily at this point, I was pretty much ambidextrous, so such a precise-

“AH! Fuck, that hurt,” I cursed as I moved a bit too fast, finishing the cut and slicing a half-inch deep gap in my arm in the process.

My hand was dead for a good fifteen seconds as my healing amulet fixed my cut, which had clearly sliced through some important nerves or muscles, probably both. The now-removed piece of armor slid off my hand, thumping to the ground.

When my hand was working again I picked up the armor and examined it. The cut was smooth, but in a way that would make lining it back up easy. Satisfied with the result I stood up and headed back to the cabinet, only to shake my head as what I needed was in my storage shed.

I looked around the room for a moment, studying the dimensions of the bridge before coming to the conclusion that it might just barely fit in here, but I wasn't sure enough to bet whatever the fuck would happen if I was wrong.

I sighed and checked the sensors again, before heading out of the bridge, rushing around to the engineering room. I pushed out the storage shed while also deploying a landing pad. I quickly headed inside the shed, carded a half dozen boxes, grabbed a bunch more things, and shoved them into a box before carding a table and traveling to the landing pad just outside the bridge.

It only took about three minutes, but I really didn't like the idea of the bridge being unoccupied. It felt too much like those nightmares where you were suddenly in the backseat of a moving, unoccupied car. I checked the sensors again, noting there was nothing nearby before getting back to my busy work.

I experimented with my comprehensive scanner for a while longer, trying my best to work in a concept of compact and un-intrusiveness without the use of transformation amalgamations, as they would throw off the deployment of the armor itself. After an hour of fiddling and enough failures that I ended up having to set up some UCMs on the bridge to print out more comprehensive scanners, I finally found the solution, one I probably should have thought of earlier. I used pop-up desk plugs and adaptors, as well as a transformation card, banking on the fact that combining it to the scanner first would separate it enough to still have the concept but not affect the armor.

After a quick study of the concepts, I combined the new comprehensive scanner with the arm, layering on two more arms and a bunch of magic rods on top of that to keep the overall shape the same. I pushed the arm out and tried it on, noting that the bands of metal under the armor plating had a few copper-colored lines mixed in, but it seemed to be simply cosmetic.

All that was left was to reattach the arm with a repair tablet, and with that, two hours after I started I was done. I flexed and stretched my arm, checking to make sure I had a full range of motion before focusing and deploying the scanner. The armor shifted, my hand opening wide as a scanning beam glowed from my palm across one of my failed attempts.

When the scan was complete a screen popped out from the side of my arm, extending out until it was slightly larger than a big cell phone, about four inches tall and seven wide. All of the information was displayed on the screen, and while I could use my finger to scroll and select what I wanted to see, I could also control it with the intent controls that worked for most of my suit.

I spent twenty minutes running it through its paces before I was finally satisfied. It was unfortunate that I couldn't get the LPM scanner to work with it as well, but I was happy to have one less thing to worry about. I was tempted to try and work the LPM scanner into my other hand but ultimately decided to leave that open for future additions.

I spent a few minutes cleaning up the mess, mostly just carding and tearing the scanner and arm rejects, before sitting back down in the pilot's chair.

Not long after I sat down I jumped up again with a curse. There was something I actually needed to build, that was actually pretty important. I headed down to engineering to grab even more supplies, including a few different styles of handcuffs. I traveled back up to the bridge and started working on something to restrain Loki with when he woke up. Chances were he wouldn't be in the best state to cast magic when he did, but I wasn't really up for taking that risk.

Eventually, after some trial and error, I worked out a series of armbands that I connected together by an ultra metal cable that would greatly reduce his movement and take his strength down a few levels. It would taser him with a blast of electricity on par with my lightning gun, silence him, knock him unconscious and teleport him to my side, all on command or at the press of a button. My final addition was a ring of truthfulness, a side creation when I was working out the kinks of my original lie detector band.

The end result could have passed for a rather ornate statement piece of jewelry, with gold bands doing various things, connected together by three strands of ultra metal cable. The bands themselves were also reinforced with ultra metal, with the entire combination enhanced by sorcerous damascus and energy cells. I tossed it into a UCM, printing out a dozen or so to keep in my cabinet of tricks. Satisfied for now, I cleaned up again before settling back down into the pilot's chair.

Eventually, after another while or so of sitting and staring out into space I started to feel myself get more and more tired. Realizing that at this point if anyone could find the ship then a few more hours of flying directionless into the void wasn't going to help. I slowly brought the *Void Skipper* to a stop. We had been coasting at a ridiculous speed for a while now anyway,

meaning that if someone could somehow track the *Skipper's* exhaust then the trail would have gone cold a couple of million miles behind us. Still, I double-checked the shields, noting that they were all repaired, and double-checked the stealth system. Satisfied that we were officially an invisible needle in a massive haystack I stood up from the pilot's chair, stretching with a grunt.

When I was done I pushed out the combat robot trunk, calling out a battle bot. When it had climbed from the crate I pointed to the console.

"If this console screen changes color at all, I want you to come to me. I'll be in room number five. If I'm not there, engage red alert," I explained, the bot nodding in confirmation. "Also if Natasha comes back to the bridge let men know."

Satisfied that I would probably get woken up before anything could go really wrong, I left the bridge and made my way to the fifth room, the door opening and letting me in. I barely had enough time to get undressed and into bed before I was asleep.

I woke up to the sound of a metal fist thumping on my door. I quickly rolled out of bed and headed to it, opening it to find the bot I had left in charge of the bridge... with Natasha behind it. She raised an eyebrow and looked me up and down, probably due to the fact that I was dressed in my boxers.

"Natasha Romanoff returned to the bridge," The bot said in its Microsoft sam like voice.

"Thank you battle bot, return to the bridge and return to your task, but cancel your orders about Natasha," I said, rubbing my face.

The bot simply nodded and turned, heading right back to the bridge, leaving Natasha and myself alone. Natasha was wearing the basic green, one-size-fit all adjustable coveralls that every room stocked itself with.

"Good morning," Natasha said, watching as I stepped back into my room, following me enough to lean on the doorway. "I- Woah... that's a lot of ink."

I looked over my shoulder at her, smirking at her surprise.

"I told you I had some when Ema gave you your durability-increasing one," I reminded her, quickly pulling on my pants.

"Yeah but I didn't think it would be anything like this, I assumed they would be invisible like mine," She admitted before stepping closer

Suddenly I could feel her hand on my back, tracing out the circle of elements tattooed there.

“Is there any significance?”

“Uhh... yeah, I mean no, no there isn't. At least beyond what they do.” I explained, swallowing a bit. “The elements do different things that sort of correspond to the elements, but that's it. This one though...”

I turned to face her, gesturing to the tattoo of my torn skin that revealed armor plating underneath.

“This is-”

“Where Hydra shot you with your own arrow,” Natasha finished, her hand reaching out to touch the tattoo, trailing over the details. “Ema does good work.”

I felt a shiver run through my spine as she traced her finger along the lines of my tattoo. It took me a moment but eventually, I managed to respond.

“T-thankfully, I can't imagine tattooing myself would turn out very well,” I said, blushing a bit. She was very close and I honestly wasn't used to it. “That's my version of the one you got.”

Natasha nodded, leaving her hand on the tattoo, eventually looking up at me.

“You know, I used to have a scar there,” She said.

“Had?”

“I'll give you one guess as to why my various scars would have disappeared,” She said, looking up at me with a smirk and a teasing smile.

“Right, sorry.”

“Don't apologize, I finally look good in a bikini.”

“...I refuse to believe you have ever looked bad in a bikini,” I said without thinking. “I don't think you could look bad in one even if you tried.”

“Good answer,” Natasha responded, stepping back and making her way out of the room, stopping by the doorway to look back at me.

“Hurry up and join me for breakfast.”

I watched as she kept walking, disappearing out of sight as she walked down the hall. It took me a minute to collect myself, but I was soon running after her to catch up.

As we stepped into the cafeteria Natasha looked around, spotting the connected kitchen on the other side of the empty room, behind a row of food serving and display counters.

"I guess we are making breakfast ourselves?" Natasha asked, giving me a questioning look.

"Uh... no, no I've got something for that. Just give me a second." I assured her, traveling back to the engineering room and rushing into my storage shed.

I quickly dug through some boxes, pulling out the original copy of Alfred, by butler droid. I carded it and rushed back through the ship, skidding to a stop at the entrance to the cafeteria. Natasha was sitting on the corner of a table, waiting for me with a smile. I got the feeling she was enjoying how nervous she was making me.

I flicked Alfred out onto the floor and turned it on with a button press. The robot deployed and stood up straight.

"Greeting sir, Madam. How may I be of service?" It asked, looking between the both of us.

Instead of responding I looked at Natasha and gestured to the robot, indicating that she was up.

"Could you make us breakfast?" She asked after a moment of hesitation.

"Of course Madam. Is there anything you are in the mood for?" It asked. "I assure you there is nothing I can't cook."

"... How about Crepe Suzette?" Natasha asked. "With bacon on the side? And a mochaccino?"

"Certainly!" The robot responded before turning to me. "And you sir?"

"I'll take the same."

The simple robot nodded before heading off into the kitchen, immediately starting to pull out all of the ingredients and tools they would need. After a few minutes of watching Natasha and I picked out a table and sat down to wait.

"So... how long until we can open a portal home?" She asked, sitting comfortably on the other side of the table from me.

“The portal projector and the Tesseract containment device should be done already,” I said confidently. “We could hypothetically open a portal right now. However, I don’t think it’s going to be that easy.”

“Why not?”

“We haven’t put in any kind of coordinates or anything,” I explained. “It’s possible that it will respond to my intent, but... I’m not going to bet on it.”

“Then what are we going to do?” She asked, her eyebrow raised. Wow, she was good at that.

“I should be able to crack it, and I have plenty of Earth-centric stuff in my storage shed that I’ll be able to force it with some work. I might have to rebuild the projector into something that only builds portals to Earth, but that wouldn’t be too difficult.”

“Why not just do that first?” She asked, leaning back as Alfred dropped off our drinks.

“I needed to make sure that the concept worked first. Plus it’s always a good idea to start with a base version before making the specific special version,” I explained. “It gives you the option of scrapping your second attempt and starting over from the base version instead of scrapping everything and starting from scratch.”

Natasha took a sip of her drink, her eyes going wide.

“This is amazing,” She said, looking from her large mug and then back to me. “How does that work?”

“Alfred has a lot of cookbooks and guides in his head,” I explained, looking over at the robot as it started cooking us breakfast. “It’s amazing and the copy I have at home has spoiled me completely.”

We talked a bit more, seemingly both deciding to stay away from business as much as possible. Eventually, Alfred dropped off our food, along with a plate of bacon.

“This... is amazing,” Natasha said in between bites. “Do you think you could donate some Alfreds to work in the shield cafeterias?”

“Would Fury even let them close?” I asked after a chuckle, getting an eye roll in response.

“Are they armed?”

“No, but it can throw a knife with pinpoint accuracy,” I responded, Natasha’s eyes going a little wide. “I didn’t teach it to them on purpose, I swear. They have three entire books on proper knife handling and it kind of evolved from that.”

“How do you know then?”

“If they get pressed for time trying to make a big meal they get creative with time-saving,” I explained. “I’ve seen my home copy throw a knife across the kitchen to land perfectly in the knife block.”

“You’re full of shit.”

I shrug and take another bite of my food, Natasha clearly trying to figure out if she believed me or not. Eventually, I cracked and started to laugh, and Natasha flicked a bit of bacon at me.

“Ass,” She said, though she was smiling. “How would I know? You do impossible things every other minute. I mean we are eating Crepe Suzette in space!”

Before I could say anything a battle bot came clunking into the room, making a beeline straight for us.

“Sir. Loki is waking up.”