

Cerion eyed the two Eternals sitting across from him, nursing two cups of coffee in their hands.

“So, it has been some time,” said Cerion, nodding at Thena. “I thought you went back to hiding for whatever reason.”

“Not hiding. After our last encounter, I needed some answers, and we felt it was better to consult an old friend.” Thena said with an air of awkwardness hanging around the duo.

Cerion looked between the two Eternals with a critical eye. He was not exactly sure what they were doing here. It was also weird to know that he got tailed in the first place. So far, he had blocked out his super senses so that he could hold a normal conversation with Jane without some random event distracting him.

'Obviously, the normal is out of the window when super-powered beings are in the mix.' Cerion thought before he stopped suppressing his senses.

His sense blanketed the area, searching for anything else he might've missed. His ears picked up on the distant humming of a colossal spaceship floating high in the sky. The engines of the ship were nearly silent, but he could hear every slight vibration that was coming out of the engine. There were also two more Eternals in the ship going by the activity inside picked up by his ears.

“So, what brings you here?”

“After your encounter with Thena, she started remembering things from her past that she was not supposed to remember. We had to contact an old friend of ours to enlist their help to make sense of Thena’s memories.” Gilgamesh explained after a moment of hesitation.

“I gather these memories do not hold good news.” said Cerion, already having a good feeling about what this was about.

He might not know the specific details of the MCU, but he had broad strokes of what was going on in it, even though he was a DC fan in the past. The Eternals were supposed to be guardians of Earth sent by the Celestials. They later split away and created a new civilisation on Titan, the homeworld of Thanos, the Mad Titan.

“We were sent to Earth by a race of powerful cosmic giants called the Eternals. We arrived some 5000 years ago to stop a predatorial race known as Deviants from consuming all intelligent life on Earth.” said Thena.

“At least, we thought we were supposed to until I regained my memories a few months back.”

Cerion frowned at the two Eternals as they looked at each other with a troubled look.

“Let me guess. These Celestials are somehow the bad guys and have an alternate reason for sending you all here.” said Cerion.

“Unfortunately, yes.” Gilgamesh said with a grave face.

“Celestials implant their seed in young planets flourishing with intelligent life. This seed is planted deep inside the planet’s core to absorb vast amounts of energy for the young Celestial to emerge. When the intelligent life on the planet reaches a certain limit, the young Celestial emerges from the planet’s core, destroying the planet and all life in it.” said Thena after taking a deep breath.

“We, the Eternals, were sent to planets to ensure intelligent life flourish and populate the planet so that the emergence could begin. The Deviants posed a threat to the plan by invading host planets and devouring all intelligent life. So, we fought and killed them wherever we could find them across the cosmos.”

“I see. Does that mean Earth has a Celestial sleeping in its core?” Cerion asked curiously.

“Yes. This planet is hosting a young celestial in its core, and we need your help to keep it from emerging from its slumber.”

“You want my help to kill it?” Cerion asked.

The two Eternals looked hesitantly at each other before nodding slowly.

“Are you sure you want to do that? I don’t think killing a Celestial would be safeguarding Earth. What if the Celestials retaliate and destroy the planet for killing one of their own?” Cerion asked, stumping the two Eternals.

Seeing that the two Eternals didn’t have an answer, he pointed out another glaring flaw in their plan.

“How are you even going to kill this Celestial sleeping inside the Earth’s core?” he asked again, leaving Thena and Gilgamesh speechless.

“If what you say is true, we must first ensure the planet’s inhabitants have a fallback home to depend on. After we’ve secured all the major species on the planet to another habitable planet, we can pursue the destruction of the Celestial or maybe keep it in sleep mode for an indefinite amount of time. What do you say?”

“We hoped you’d have a solution to remove the sleeping Celestial without damaging the planet.” Gilgamesh said frankly, dropping his shoulders in disappointment.

“Why would you think that?” Cerion asked, even though he had a good idea about how to go about killing a Celestial.

After all, he had accidentally stumbled into that particular can of worms while mining Vibranium from Antarctica. But he would only share the method with the Eternals after he had earned their trust. Besides, he had not perfected the weapon and had no idea whether there were any unforeseen consequences in using a bio-weapon against a Celestial. Synthesising the space plague into a bio-weapon was not exactly a safe weapon to deploy against cosmic giants that had power over matter, energy and space.

“Your energy is very similar to a Celestial. In fact, we believe it was Thena’s exposure to your energy that facilitated the recovery of her memories.” said Gilgamesh.

“Fascinating,” Cerion whispered while frowning thoughtfully at the two Eternals. “Do you think you can spare a few days with me on one of my bases on this planet? I’d like to learn more about these Celestials, and we can discuss other options to protect this planet from this sleeping Celestial.”

“We’ll have to discuss this with our friends?” said Thena after sharing a silent conversation with her fellow Eternal.

“By all means, please. I suspect they're bored out of their minds hanging around in that ship of yours.” said Cerion, jabbing his thumb towards the sky, making Thena’s and Gilgamesh’s eyes widen like saucers.

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Cerion observed the samples he acquired from the dead carcass of the Celestial he found in Antarctica. It was a hassle to move the giant bodily remains of the Celestial to Koron, but he managed it with the use of his space bridge. At first, he had thought to leave it there, but now he was patting himself on the back for having the presence of mind to move the remains to his base. Using his drones, he had Optima build a giant vault to keep the remains in isolation for study, and that was how he came across the invasive species that killed the Celestial. He had charmingly named it the space plague because it acted like a plague inside the Celestial's body.

In reality, the invasive species was an insectoid creature that possessed a type of energy that was modifying the Celestial from its basic building blocks of life. He didn't know what would happen once the condition ran its full cycle. He hoped the space plague would end up killing the Celestial, but he was not sure that was the end result. Even now, the celestial he unearthed from ice is not entirely dead. Whatever process the space plague was using to infect its Celestial host, it never ran its course as both of them were frozen deep in billions of years of ice until he unearthed them from the continent and secured them in a vault.

"So, what exactly do you want me to do?" Bruce asked, joining Cerion.

"Study the infection, Bruce. I want you to study the insects and, if possible, extract a pathogen that can mortally attack the Celestial cells." said Cerion.

"Is that really necessary? These Celestials appear to have turned a blind eye on Earth for this long. Maybe they lost interest in our planet." said Bruce with a troubled look.

"You only know as much as I do about these Celestials, which is almost nothing. Let's not jump to conclusions and hope for the best. That has never worked for any primitive civilisation coming in contact with an advanced one."

"Ask the Indians. They know it better than anyone else." he added as an afterthought.

"I suppose I could try my best." Bruce said with a sigh.

"Thank you, Bruce. Optima will help you every step of the way." Cerion patted the friendly scientist on his shoulder.

"I look forward to working with you, Dr Banner." said Optima, materialising a virtual womanly form near Bruce, startling even Cerion.

He quietly withdrew and observed the two while they discussed what should be done about the remains of the Celestial. It didn't concern him that Optima was slowly rewriting her own code to better interact with everyone. Cerion suspected it had more to do with Optima's desire to converse better with Bruce, as the friendly doctor was Koron's sole permanent resident. But that would change soon, as he planned on filling the island with a significant human presence. The work on that front was progressing, and he just needed to outsource some of the recruiting work.

Turning away from the duo, Cerion looked out of the glass panes of his lab to see drones diligently engaged in constructing houses near the beachhead in a perfect arc. More were being built to house a proper human colony on the island. The island's interior was filled with tree houses that blended well with nature and the island's ecosystem. The plan was to create a human colony with minimal impact on the island's self-sustaining ecosystem.

But once the Eternals came around to his way of thinking, he planned to start another base on Mars or one of Jupiter's moons. After all, he was only a few months from completing the World Engine.

He went down a few levels until he came face to face with the bay area where the World Engine was being worked on. He had some modifications to the colossal machine to reflect the changes he required in terraforming a planet. High gravitational fields were no longer needed, so he had all the parameters of the World Engine changed. Mostly because he had no intent on recreating Krypton in this universe or cloning Kryptonians. The only reason he had even started building a World Engine using the data from the archives was because he was hoping to terraform Mars and use it as a base. Failing that, he was hoping to create a base in one of the innumerable moons present in the galaxy.

Placing all his eggs in one basket was not a mistake Cerion was willing to commit. Therefore, distant bases outside and inside the Sol system were his goal. That way, he could continue operating uncontested even if he was forced to abandon Earth for whatever reason.

But seeing the World Engine reminded him of the cousin he was separated from while escaping Krypton.

"I hope you're safe, Kal."

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Cerion stepped onto the stage, greeted by the excited cheer of the crowd gathered inside the expo venue in Mountain View, California. Like last time, the event was being streamed live on YouStream. Unlike last time, he had attracted quite a lot of national media as well, owing to the unprecedented success of his phones and other digital gadgets.

“Thank you. Thank you for your warm welcome and your patience.”

Cerion smiled at the crowd as they settled down while the screen behind him proudly displayed the symbol of his company.

“I started Vex Corp as a software company, and within the span of a few years, we’ve grown out of that industry and branched out. That’s because the motto of Vex Corp is to – advance the world by advancing ourselves. We’ve embraced this motto to our hearts, and therefore, we’ve boldly expanded into telecom, med-tech, electronic gadgets, social media, and cyber security.”

“Today, I’m proud to announce two new fields Vex Corp is stepping in to compete. We’re proud to announce we’ll be stepping into the automobile and clean energy industry.”

The stage shook as a brand new car emerged from the bottom part of the stage. The car was slowly spun on the platform so the cameras could capture the vehicle from all angles. Its shiny, black, sharp silhouette attracted the attention of the audience.

“Everyone, I’d like you to meet Quarks Model X. It runs on hydrogen fuel, an alternative to the gas we use in our cars right now, as it’s cheap and clean. In the following days, you’ll see Vex Corp starting hydrogen fuel pumps across the great state of California and expanding outwards.”

Seeing that he had the room's attention, he flicked on the remote, and the screen now showed more data and features about Quarks. Cerion began explaining everything there was to know about the car and the hydrogen fuel-powered engine. He also took his sweet time introducing the audience to the Energeon project aimed at constructing a fusion reactor. It was his answer to all the hippies breathing down on his neck, and the board was quite excited to show it off for the easy PR work.

Of course, only a select few on the board of Vex Corp understood the Energeon project was not merely a publicity stunt.

Immediately after the press release, Cerion took the opportunity to bring the board members to the bottom chamber of Vex Corp HQ, where the reactor was situated.

“So, you already had the reactor up and running.” One of the board members said, observing the dormant reactor.

“Yes and no. We’ve run some preliminary tests, and the results were promising. However, the reactor has never been active for more than an hour as per the guidelines approved by the board.” Cerion explained.

“So, you’re confident it works.”

“More than confident. As you all know, many past attempts have been made to create a sustainable fusion reactor. The problem has always been with the dense energy consumed by the superconducting coils that create stabilising magnetic fields. We’ve managed to achieve a net positive fusion reactor.” Cerion declared.

“So, that means we’re the only private entity in the world with a working prototype of a fusion reactor in the world.” a board member breathed, eyeing the 20-foot tall reactor hungrily.

“I think I can speak for everyone here that we’d like to see the Enegeon project go ahead in full swing. The implications of its success are not something we can ignore. With nuclear energy bottlenecked by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Enegeon project could supplant Nuclear reactors across our nation.”

The board members whispered excitedly, already formulating plans to commercialise the Enegeon reactor.

Cerion had also come to the same conclusion, considering his knowledge of the actual energy output of the reactor once he updated the core. For now, he kept a bulky design and a low-yield core for the reactor. The plan was for a progressive scaling down to be done on the reactor design with an increased yield core generating more energy.

The current energy estimates were well below the yield of a standard first-generation nuclear reactor but more than enough to be an improvement over other clean energy projects based on solar, geothermal and wind.

The best estimates resulted in a net energy yield of 9000 MWh if the Enegeon reactor ran unimpeded for 24 hours. In a year, the reactor should theoretically generate 3,285,000 MWh. The overall plan in Cerion’s mind was to spread the first-gen Enegeon generators in California and the rest of the states within a five-year span and supply the generated energy to the National Grid. After

the first five years, he could introduce certain modifications to the reactor and build more energy-efficient reactors. The progression could continue until the Energeon reactors could outproduce the daily output of third-generation nuclear reactors.

'In fifteen years, I'll have the nuclear power plants shut in the country. I'll need some lobbying done in the Senate to push that through.' Cerion thought.

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Thomas Eckhart pushed his wheelchair despondently towards his kitchen. When he neared the kitchen cabinet, he desperately searched for his coffee mug. With some luck, he found the mug and rolled his chair towards the coffee maker. On the way, the cup slipped from his lap and fell on the floor. His eyes were drawn to the immobile cup lying on the floor, and his attention was drawn to his absentee legs.

He felt the all too familiar feeling of his lost limbs, but he could see as clearly as day. Everything below his knees was air and nothing else.

'Phantom limb.' Thomas thought grimly, remembering the words of the military doctor and counsellors after he returned from the Arabian peninsula.

He tried to reach for the cup, but it wasn't easy to pick it up. In the end, he abandoned the attempt and rolled himself to his room without the coffee. His eyes fell on the 22 Magnum revolver near his bedside table. Immediately, his mind was bombarded with the sound of gunfire and screams. The scent of blood and sweat suddenly came into his nostrils, and then the sound of an explosion followed by pain.

"God!"

Thomas slammed his eyes shut while taking several deep breaths to centre himself, but his heart was beating like there was no tomorrow. Tears streamed down from his eyes, realising that he was all alone. He had been drafted into the army when the war against terror broke out, and when he returned, he was a cripple, and his dead was dead. He was now alone in his house, barely scraping by without a job.



He slowly rolled himself on his wheelchair until he neared the table and picked up the gun. Taking a gulp of air, he pressed the barrel of the pistol against his head. Screwing his eyes shut, he began to take deep breaths as he tried to find the nerves to pull the trigger. He stayed like that for a full five minutes until he found the courage to end his suffering.

Taking one last steady breath, he pressed on the lever. At least, he tried to, but the lever didn't budge.

"Dying is easy, but living, now that's the braver option."

Thomas' eyes widened as he heard a smooth voice speak from behind him. When he turned around to look at the man, his eyes couldn't help but widen further. Standing behind him was a man dressed in bright silver armour with wings that shined with starlight.

"Good god in heaven!" Thomas breathed.

"You've lost hope and are blinded by the darkness of despair. Let me bring you to the light."

The angel spoke, and Thomas was consumed by light.