

The group was quiet for a long moment, though I could tell most of them were silent from disbelief rather than shock at what I was offering them. It was Queen Ramonda who finally responded.

“We cannot be bribed by shiny trinkets,” She said confidently. “We are not so easily distracted from the crimes committed against us.”

“I am curious as to why you care. Why have you admitted this transgression?” The science advisor asked, getting a nod of agreement from the River Tribe Elder.

“Because, I would like to scan more of your technology, specifically your shield projectors,” I answered, hurrying to get it out before everything erupted. “As well as any deep space scanning systems you m-”

The shouting started before I could finish my sentence, though I managed to get the important bits out. In truth, this was what I expected. As much as I hated to admit it, I had stolen from them in a way, at least from their perspective, and for a culture as isolationist and protective of its tech as Wakanda... There wasn't much worse I could have done to make them dislike me. But that didn't mean I had to like it. It was a particularly scathing insult that insinuated several vulgar things about my parents that finally pushed me over the edge. I slammed my hand on the table, denting the wood with my palm.

“That is enough!” I shouted, silencing the shouts, all but T'Chaka flinching from my outburst.

T'Challa stood with reflexes and speed that clearly confirmed he was the current Black Panther, and I could feel the dozens of weapons around me being readied. T'Chaka rested his hand on his son's arm, pulling him back down into his seat.

“I understand that what I did was questionable at best, but I will not sit here and let insults be thrown around. I did what I did in preparation to defend the planet from threats that would wipe Wakanda from the face of the Earth as easily as you swat a mosquito,” I said, undaunted by the weapons pointed in my direction. “I will admit, at the time those threats were nebulous, but I will also point out that the *Void Skipper* was finished for less than a week before I used it as a battering ram to push a Chitauri hive ship back through a portal to deep space. A WEEK.”

I took a deep breath, closed my eyes, and let my frustration bleed away, leaning back in my chair as I let a long breath go.

“If I hadn't used the scans of your tech, the Chitauri, a race even the Asgardians have struggled to eradicate, would have landed on our planet. I believe you are all smart enough to know what that would mean.”

I let them digest that for a long moment before continuing.

“The reason I’m here now, apologizing to you and asking permission is that I no longer *need* your tech. Between Asgard and several other contributions I have everything I need to work on my next project, the second step of defending Earth,” I explained, barely holding off more annoyed comments. “A planetary shield that envelopes the entire planet in a protective bubble. One strong enough to shrug off anything that those who would harm us, the Ulysses Klaue’s of the universe, could throw at it.”

“And you want to use Wakandan technology to do it?” The king asked.

“Yes. As I explained, having more versions of an item makes it easier for me to push it further and further. So far I have three types of shield projection methods that I will be working together, more than enough to get the job done...”

“But using our shield systems as well would make it even stronger,” King T’Chaka finished, nodding in understanding. “You come to us now in honesty because you can afford to.”

“Exactly. At the time you were the only source of thrusters that worked with energy, rather than solid fuel. At the time, I couldn’t take no for an answer if I wanted to start production in any reasonable time frame. Of course, by now I have scans of several thruster systems that I could have used instead, but at the time I only had access to repulsor tech and normal rocket thrusters, neither of which was what I really needed.”

King T’Chaka shifted slightly in his chair, his eyes staying focused on me. He didn’t look away, and neither did I, even after his advisors recovered from my outburst and began berating me again. He raised his hand, silencing everyone with a gesture before motioning to the guards around us. They silently withdrew their weapons as he leaned forward, eyes still locked on mine. Even though I was pretty sure T’Challa had already inherited the mantle of Black Panther, he still managed to look imposing, despite his age.

“You would only use our shielding technology to protect the Earth, for nothing else?” He asked solemnly.

The two Elders immediately began to voice concerns, but again he silenced them with a gesture.

“You have my word that I will only use it to protect the world,” I confirmed with a nod. “I can also swear that your actual technology won’t show up in the final product. The way my power works, your tech will be safe from prying eyes. Shield and the WSC won’t even be able to tell that I use vibranium.”

The King was silent for a while as he considered my words, studying my face for a full minute before he nodded.

“As long as our involvement is hidden I will allow you to scan our shield technology and deep space sensors. If there was anything worth setting aside our isolationism, then the opportunity to protect the world from threats from beyond the stars... would be it. This is an order from your King. Carson Walsh is to be allowed to scan the city shield projectors, the deep space sensors, and any related technology.”

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His advisors had a thing or two to say about his declaration, but King T'Chaka put them to rest quickly, brokering no arguments about his decision. Within ten minutes the meeting had ended and I was once again being guided through the city, riding another trolley-like hovering vehicle as T'Challa and his bodyguards escorted us to our destination. M'Kada, the science advisor also joined us.

Now that the meeting was over I had an opportunity to focus on my two guides. T'Challa looked pretty much the same as he did last time I met him at Tony's. The advisor was a tall woman with a sharp face and a serious expression. She had hardly even looked my way since we left the meeting.

We stepped off the transport and M'Kada lead us to another building. This one looked almost entirely modern, with no major traditional accents. It was still stylized though, with a pleasant, semi-cylindrical shape that cut off suddenly at a thirty-degree angle. Before we stepped inside I looked up, spotting the faint blue glow that was the shield, far above the top of the tallest building in the city.

“Is the shield always on?” I asked looking at T'Challa. “The energy needed for that must be intensive.”

T'Challa looked at me for a moment, clearly still trying to figure out what to think about me. Eventually, he seemed to come to some sort of conclusion, though his obvious political training made it hard to tell exactly what it was.

“It is, but on its lowest setting,” He explained. “We rely on our active holo-projected camouflage for our true protection.”

“Incredible, even that low setting...” I trailed off as we stepped out of the heat and into the cooler interior.

“Will the planetary shield remain on?” The science advisor asked, looking over his shoulder as we stepped into an elevator.

"I don't know," I admitted easily. "My creations... conceptual crafting isn't a hard science. I think I will try to keep it always on, but I might find I have better results attaching the system to a powerful threat sensor."

"Threat sensor?" T'Challa asked. "How exactly does something like that work?"

"It's a derivative of an earlier creation, a danger sense ability that alerts the user when they are being maliciously targeted, or are in danger of being attacked or hurt," I explained, chuckling at both the advisors and the Prince's reaction. "As I said, my creation method is not a hard science."

Before either of them could respond, the elevator door opened, revealing a teenage girl around thirteen or fourteen years old waiting. She smiled at my escorts, frowning when she looked at me.

"Teacher M'Kada, Brother, what are you doing here?" She asked, eyeing me. "Why is there a white man and a blue lady with you?"

"What are *you* doing here, Shuri?" T'Challa asked. "Father asked the building be cleared of all non-essential personal."

"I *am* essential personal, Brother, I was adjusting the modulation for the northeast section twelve," She explained as if it was obvious. "I think I finally found the reason for its energy spiking. Now, who are they?"

"I am Carson Walsh, and this is Emerald," I explained. "You must be Princess Shuri?"

"Great. What is he doing here?"

"Shuri, Mr. Walsh is Maker, he-"

"You!" She said, suddenly stepping a lot closer, looking up at me with a harsh look. "How does it work, how did you make it? It shouldn't function but even now it points to his unmarked grave!"

It took me a second to realize she was talking about the Klaue locator I had given them not too long ago. I did my best not to chuckle at her enthusiasm, but she still noticed it immediately, and I could see her working herself up to another barrage of questions when T'Challa put his hand on her shoulder.

"Shuri, Mr. Walsh is here on business, the sooner it is done the sooner he will be out of our hair,"

"But-"

“Unfortunately Princess Shuri, the way my equipment works isn’t really tied to reality,” I explained. “They work, simply because it does.”

This seemed to annoy her even more, but both M’Kada and T’Challa gave her harsh looks. She pouted before stepping into the elevator around us.

“Fine. But I will figure out how it works eventually Maker, it's only a matter of time!”

As we stepped off the elevator, the doors closed after us, and Shuri pointed to her eyes and then at me, just before they shut completely. I let out another chuckle. She was interesting.

After another minute we stepped through a doorway, which opened up into a decent-sized room. Inside was a central raised circular platform, which was completely encased by a singular transparent window, cutting off access to the machine that sat in the center of the platform. The machine was made up of three prongs that slowly spun around a central glowing spike, which was spinning in the opposite direction as the prongs. I could feel the energy in the room, even through the protective barrier.

All around the central structure were dozens of computer pannels, screens, and projections. A quick peek showed all of them were connected to this shield projector, monitoring every single aspect of it.

“This is the projector for the Southeast section number thirteen,” M’Kada explained as she stopped by the central window, gesturing to the spinning machine inside. “The system can be monitored from this location, but mostly the shield is controlled by the central hub three floors up.”

“How many shield projectors are there in total?” I asked, slowly walking around the platform.

“There are one hundred and twenty shield projectors running currently, working together to project the shield around the Golden City,” She explained, watching me as I looked inside the blocked off the platform. “Each one is responsible for a different section.”

“So it's not one complete shield, but multiple shields working together. Not exactly what I was hoping for,” I said with a nod. “Still, between this and the stealth field, you are more or less on par with Asgard. That is impressive. How do I get inside to scan the projector itself?”

M’Kada looked at me for a moment before walking around and tapping a few buttons, stepping back from the unit after a few moments. A red pale light started to flash, and the projector began to slow down, eventually coming to a stop, its glow fading as well. When it was completely immobile there was a hissing sound, before the thick protective barrier started to rise

into the ceiling. The hiss made me think that it had been a vacuum on the other side, which was interesting, but not really important.

I flicked out my scanner and scanned the machine, examining the blueprint through the scanner for a minute, making sure it contained everything that I needed. When I was satisfied I turned and started scanning the control pannels and status displays that were set up around the projector. When I was done with that I turned to M’Kada again, who was conversing with T’Challa quietly. Of course, Ema and I could hear them perfectly, but they were simply discussing how I could possibly scan their systems so fast, with M’Kada assuring the prince it wasn’t possible.

“You might want to check that console over there,” I said with a smile, pointing to the second to last screen I scanned. “Something called a ‘crystalline energy transfer unit three-B-four-six-one’ is about to fail. You’ve got maybe a month or so before it gives out.”

M’Kada and T’Challa gave me blank looks, the latter looking to M’Kada, clearly looking for reassurance.

“How... Your device truly scans to such detail?” She asked, shocked. “How could it even know the part number?”

“Is he correct?” T’Challa asked.

“I... I would have to disassemble the console to find out... and it would have a crystalline energy transfer unit... of what model I do not know,” She reluctantly admitted, before focusing on me again. “I will let a maintenance team know. Thank you.”

“No problem. Could I get some scans of the main control room, they should have the concepts I need to tie the control system together nicely,” I asked. “Then we can go to the sensors.”

T’Challa nodded, though clearly, he wasn’t happy with being bossed around by me, an outsider. It was unfortunate, but I given the fact that I was getting what I needed, the prince of Wakanda not liking me was a small price to pay. With any luck he would cool off over time.

The Prince and M’Kada, along with his bodyguards, led Ema and me up to the top floor via another elevator, where I got scans of the equipment used to monitor and control all of the projectors at once. I got quite a few looks from the people manning these stations, ranging from simple curiosity to open distaste. I ignored them for the most part, focusing on the task at hand.

When I was done in the shield control room, my escort hurried me through the city to teh far outskirts, to a building built into the top of a mountain. It was surprisingly cold there, a relief from the previous heat. They rushed me through the building, which turned out to be a satellite monitoring station that beamed back data from two dozen stealth satellites around the world.

When I complained that this was hardly what I needed, they reluctantly let me scan the sensor systems that would be mounted on the satellite and aimed into space or the atmosphere to monitor for disturbances. I got the feeling that this building had recently gone through a massive overhaul and improvement.

Not long after I got the scans I needed from there, I was brought to the edge of their territory and promptly handed my landing pad by a tattooed and marked warrior.

“We have given you what you wanted,” T’Chaka, who had been waiting for us to arrive, said. “Now, you must leave. I understand your intentions were good, but for now, we ask you to respect our wishes for you not to return.”

“I suppose I can’t blame you,” I admitted, carding my landing pad. “Before I go, have you thought about what I said in my letter?”

“I have,” The King answered, pausing for a long moment before continuing, looking me in the eye. “Wakanda will remain hidden for now. Our people are not ready to rejoin any more than the outside world is ready for us.”

“That may be true, but if the effort isn’t made no one will ever be ready,” I said, shaking my head.

“Perhaps, but that is our decision to make,” He responded, looking behind me for a moment before reaching out to shake my hand, leaning in, and talking at a much quieter volume. “Though you may be happy to hear that a young American biochemist will have a breakthrough concerning the treatment of Tuberculosis within the next few weeks. And a few months after that, a research group in Germany will develop a revolutionary new treatment method for cancer, one that will drastically increase the survival rate of many of the most lethal variants.”

It took me a moment to realize what he was implying, and why he was being quiet.

“That’s good news,” I responded with a smile. “That is very good news.”

“I would have to agree.” He responded. “Wakanda may stay hidden, but that does not mean we wish harm to the innocents of the world.”

“I’m glad to hear things King T’Chaka,” I responded, releasing his hand with a nod.

I took a step back and Ema put her hand on my shoulder, and I traveled us away without another word.