

Natasha and I stepped onto the bridge and headed straight for the new console, located behind and to the left of the main pilot's station. The battle bot who was stationed as a makeshift early warning system looked up as we entered but immediately looked back down at the sensor console.

"Alright, so let's see how you turned out..." I mumbled, sitting down and activating the screen.

Unfortunately, this chair, while comfortable did not contain the basics of how to use the console, as the pilot's chair did. Instead, I had to puzzle it out myself. Thankfully there weren't any random buttons or poorly labeled knobs, it was all a pretty easy-to-understand touch screen with a few different tabs and a central home screen. The shields, sorcerous damascus, and the engines all had similar screens, where I could boost the power available to them by... a ridiculous factor. I tabbed through to the shield screen and adjusted their input, tripling their strength. Immediately a red bar started slowly filling, a timer at the top counting down from ten minutes. I lowered the Tesseract energy input, and the bar slowed down even more, while the timer increased.

"Okay, so it seems like there is only so far I can increase the shields," I explained. "I guess I shouldn't be surprised that an Infinity Stone would burn out my systems."

I tabbed through to the engines and increased their energy input, noting that the red bar rose much slower when compared to the shields. The layer of sorcerous damascus on the hull was in the middle, rising faster than the engines but slower than the shields.

"Could you improve that at all?" Natasha asked, standing behind me and looking over my shoulder.

"Probably, using the scans of the ship we got, assuming it wasn't a hunk of junk," I said with a shrug. "Some directed tech development might work as well. If Tony designed something that absorbs and directs high amounts of energy or power I could conceptually craft that to impossible levels and then layer that into the development of all of the systems I want to use the Tesseract to boost. But even then it will probably have limitations. It's an infinity stone, those don't tend to get controlled very easily."

I tabbed away from the energy distribution tabs and focused on portal creation, going through the screen with a fine tooth comb. I quickly realized the first problem.

"It's asking for some sort of coordinates," I explained with a frown. "But I don't know them. Fuck, alright, I'm going to have to hard-code a trip to Earth then. Do you want to come to watch or hang out around the ship? I don't know how long this is going to take and I'm probably going to start by working on something else so it can start in the background."

"I'll come with you, but who is going to watch over the bridge?"

I gesture to the battle bot, who was still looking down at the sensor console, watching it closely.

"It's been long enough, anyone who could track us would have already gotten here. I think we should be good."

"Well... what about the portal projector?" She asked, looking down at the console. "How dangerous would a random jump be?"

"Consider the ridiculously small percentage of space that actually contains anything... probably fine. Not like we would have to worry about hyperspace lanes or gravity wells..." I admitted, looking down at the console curiously. "As intuitive as it might be, though, I don't know if it has a random function..."

I spent another ten minutes going through the console before deciding that it did not have a random function, but it did have a method of selecting the nearest star system. I tapped on the system. After a minute of thought, I engaged the portal projector.

The ship shuddered for just a moment before a beam of energy fired out from the ship, the placement of the viewscreens making it look like it came out from under us. A pale blue beam of energy raced out before stopping and exploding into a massive portal, easily big enough for the *Void Skipper* to get through.

"Well...at least that works," I mumbled, standing up and heading to the pilot's chair, sitting down and taking control.

After double-checking to make sure the stealth field was up I guided the *Void Skipper* in, entering the portal in one easy swoop.

"Sir! The sensor screen has changed sir!" The battle bot said after standing straight and turning to me.

"Thanks, power down for now," I said, rolling my eyes as I brought up the sensor readings on my screen.

The system was small, with only a singular, cold planet orbiting around a sun that threw off similar readings to sol. I did a wide sweep of the entire system before leaning back and studying the view screen.

"Alright, we are now six light years away from where we first came through the portal," I said with a smile before turning to Natasha, who had followed me to the pilot's seat.

“Congratulation Natasha. You are part of the first crew of Earthlings to travel to a different solar system.”

Natasha didn't respond, instead, we both just watched as a lone, frozen planet orbiting a distant star.

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An hour or so later I was back in engineering, trying to crack open a way to make a dedicated portal projector. I had already set up the two extra LPMs to print out a few dozen different copies of various naval cannons, as well some of the Wakandan weapons I had scans of, along with two Wakanadan and the US control systems for those weapons. Of course, since the engineering room was already getting a bit crowded I set them up to print in the hangar bay. I left them to print as I work, I would experiment and work them into something serviceable when I was done figuring out how to get us home.

When that was all set up though, I started working through the parts of the original portal projector again. When I had gone through it before, I had been doing it in chunks in order to save time, printing out large pieces of the machine so I could find what I needed. Now though, I was after a much more specific part, the part that set or directed the energy to a specific destination. They clearly had some way of controlling, and I needed that piece to use as the base.

So I picked a starting point on the machine and worked my way through, the ship-based LPM printing out each part, which I would then card and decide if it was what I needed. I started with the control panel but quickly discarded it as it had the concept of control and precision, as well as high tech and several others, but not what I was looking for.

The process was slow, each piece taking anywhere from a few minutes to half an hour, When each part was done the machine would move on to the next part while I would card and examine the piece before discarding it by tearing its card or labeling it and add it to the storage shed for future use. I considered canceling the weapon printouts on the other two LPMs and using them to speed up the process, but I ended up leaving them to their work. The *Void Skipper* needed to be armed ASAP.

Natasha and I chatted in between pieces, at least at first. Eventually, after two hours of going through parts, we left engineering to get some lunch and visit the entertainment rooms, letting the LPM print out a whole pile of parts. About four hours after that I returned to the engineering room and went through everything.

Turns out that there were four distinct parts that helped guide the portal to open up at the proper destination on the other side. Just as before I had no idea how any of this worked, but I could still feel my way around the concepts. So, I gathered up everything related to destination guidance and set them up on the UCMs, printing out dozens of copies of each piece. I was

going to need a lot of them if I wanted to combine them with other stuff and still have them function as the same part.

At that point, the weapon systems I had printed were done. My selection wasn't exactly the best, especially when compared to the massive fuck off cannon that the Chitauri had used during the invasion. Still, I should be able to put together some powerful close-quarters weaponry, capable of driving off-boarding ships and enemy fighters.

I had a few dozen copies of several different weapon systems to combine together, most from Wakanda and two from US naval vessels, which, according to the blueprints from the LPM, shot hundred-and-twenty-seven millimeter rounds. I had a massive pile of those rounds printed out as well, which is where I started. I combined the rounds together, adding in magic and energy cells as well, ending up with around thirty conceptually enhanced rounds. I combined those with the naval artillery, which massively upped their damage output.

I then started triple stacking the weapon systems together, adding in magic and ultra metal, before splitting the two physical US weapons and combining them en masse with the Wakandan energy cannons, of which there were a few different styles.

The idea was to boil it all down to a singular weapon system to scan, one that fired energy but would still have a physical impact. I mixed in extra energy cells and magic as often as possible, as well as ultra metal to make them tougher.

The final result was interesting and looked like a true combination of American and Wakandan design, though it did lean a little heavier on the Wakandan influences. It was flatter than the naval artillery had been, with fins attached to the back, angled downward and perpendicular to the ground. It was sleek, but still angular, looking a little like the turret of an M1 Abrams tank, with the back section replaced by fins and a few more smoothing angles. It was also slightly larger than the tank turret would have been. I carded it to get a feel for its concepts, though it left me feeling a bit wobbly from the effort.

Conceptually it was a powerful weapon, a solid counterpart to the main cannons I was picturing putting together. I scanned it with the LPM scanner and headed back up to engineering, cueing up forty finished cannons, which I labeled a medium cannon in the LPM for simplicity's sake. I then programmed the two extra LPMs to attach a total of fifty of these cannons, stationed all over the ship, making sure that every angle had multiple turrets covering it. Then I broke them up into six groupings, organized by their firing arcs, and created six turret control stations inside the brig.

The turret control stations were complicated pieces of work themselves, a combination of Wakandan and US control methods, with plenty of conceptual crafting to get everything working together. The gunners could switch from simple target painting to full manual control, as well as disabling certain turrets, and scaling energy loads for high and low-powered shots.

Learning how to effectively station them would be one hell of a learning curve, but they would do it for now.

The last thing I did was attach the turrets to the already existing Tesseract powering system, letting whoever was in charge of that station divert extra energy into them, for however long they could handle it.

By the time I finished that, the UCMs were done printing out the extra parts for the Earth-focused portal projector. With those sets I started going through my storage shed, pulling out anything that might let me tie those parts directly to Earth. I piled together star charts from Earth's perspective, maps and satellite imagery of Earth, two different types of globes, and a few bags of dirt. I even cut out the sections of three different encyclopedias that talked about it, as well as images that showed the Earth's position in our solar system.

Once it was all gathered I started working them into the parts, making sure to layer it all to keep them from influencing the size and strength of the parts. It took a while, and quite a few extra UCM copies, but eventually I scanned the final version in and started the ship-attached LPM working on a second, Earth-only portal projector, tucking it up inside the *Void Skipper's* left "wing". It connected easily to the Tesseract energy networking console.

With the project done and under construction, I headed off to find Natasha, who had abandoned me sometime around when I started mumbling to myself, my brain focused on the concepts. I apologized for losing track again, but she only laughed and said it was fine. We enjoyed dinner and relaxed for the rest of the night, which was only for another hour before we went our separate ways to sleep.

The second projector finished sometime when we were both asleep, and we both met up at the bridge after breakfast the next "morning". She was awake before me, sitting down in one of the now-finished gunners' chairs, clearly trying to figure it out.

"The fact that you whipped this all together last night is incredible," she said, shaking her head.

"Well, I have a bit of an advantage," I admitted. "Plus it's based on existing stuff."

I walked further into the bridge and plopped down at the Tesseract control console, waking it up and scrolling through the tabs, ignoring the new weapons tab and selecting the new portal projector tab.

This new tab was simply an image of the Earth, with the moon floating around it. I could spin it around and select anywhere around it, from feet over the surface all the way past the moon's orbit, as long as it was an Earth-centric portal.

"Alright, let's get home," I said, selecting a space by the moon.

"Is it wrong that I kind of want a few more days off?" Natasha asked.

"Not really. Your welcome to stay with me for a bit if you would like, I'm likely not making contact with anyone for a day at least."

"Why not?"

"Thor is going to want to take the Tesseract back to Asgard... and I want to keep it," I admitted with a shrug. "They want to use it to fix something, and I'm going to offer an alternative way. Plus I need to convince Fury to let Asgard have the Mind Stone, so I'll need to make something to barter with in exchange."

"Any ideas?" She asked, quickly getting over her surprise about what I wanted to do.

"A few, but it depends on the feasibility. I want to bounce ideas around with Ema, and your welcome to stick around and watch," I said with a smile. "Now do me a favor and hop in the pilot's seat, and fly us through."

"Sure," She said eagerly, quickly heading to the pilot's chair.

As we talked the portal had opened, the beam of energy the same color as the first time, only this time coming from slightly above and to the left of the forward viewscreen.

"Should I leave the stealth field on?" She asked, looking over her shoulder at me once she was sitting.

"Yup, I would prefer not to be seen until I'm ready."

Natasha took control of the ship near perfectly, guiding us closer and closer to the portal, our projector maintaining it until the last second when it cut off. The portal stayed open though, decaying slowly as we passed through. Looking back at the aft view screens I could see the roiling smoke-like energy of the portal closing behind us. The moon floated beside us now, the Earth filling the forward viewscreen completely. Both of us stared for a while.

"I hadn't realized until just now how nervous I was about getting back here," I admitted, Natasha, nodding along. "I knew eventually I would figure out a way, but..."

"I knew you could do it, but I know what you mean," Natasha agreed. "So...?"

"Oh, yeah, put it in orbit around the moon," I said, watching as the beautiful redhead maneuvered the *Void Skipper* into position.

When the ship was in a stable orbit and set to autopilot, I traveled the both of us down to the warehouse.

“Ema! I’m home!” I called out, taking a step off the landing pad only to stop and look around.

There were ten trunks, which I immediately recognized as my robot trunks, stacked by the landing pad. There were also a whole group of caduceus droids standing by a whole extra section of UCMs. The UCMs were printing out nurse stones by the dozens, while the caduceus droids, who all had landing pads duct taped to their backs, organized them into crates.

“Welcome back!” I hear Ema shout, turning to watch as she came around the lounge corner.

She did not look happy.