

## Chapter 27 - Fighting chance

It didn't take long for us to run out of road in the direction we needed to go. The desert was sparse and thankfully empty, with scraggly bush covered hills. The ride was bumpy but due to the truck's upgrades it was nothing too severe. I could hear Volstagg whoop from the back as we actually caught air of a small bump, landing easily.

"How much further?" Thor asked loudly, leaning forward in his seat. "We should have-"

I slammed on the brakes and pulled the truck to the left, barely managing to avoid an orange beam of energy that slammed into the hill we had just rode over, rocking us as it exploded. The truck drifted in the sandy dirt, spraying dust as we drove around a large, metal covered humanoid that I unfortunately recognized from the comics. Burnished bands of metal looped around to form a body, back lit by a fire glowing inside the torso. The top of its head was flanged, flaring slightly like the rim of a cap.

"The Destroyer!" Thor shouted. "Loki must have sent it to kill me and silence my friends!"

I nodded and kept driving, slowing slightly to turn and drive back around. The Destroyer turned and fired at us again, thankfully missing once more as we crested and drove down another hill, which now stood between us.

"Everyone out!" I shouted as I climbed out of the truck, everyone doing so quickly.

"Thor... You still want to try and talk your brother down?"

"I must, I could never forgive myself otherwise."

I nodded and turned to the four others while carding my jacket. I pressed the buttons to activate my armor and gestured around.

"You guys circle around while Thor and I hold his attention. If it doesn't back down then hit it hard."

Lady Sif looked to Thor who nodded before leading the warriors three away. Quickly I pulled off my archers ring, then pushed out my bow and quiver, handing them to Ema.

"Here! Take this and hit him hard if I call out. Hold them back a bit, I want to try a few things first."

"Okay! Good luck." She said in my ear before nodding to Thor and running after the others. I pressed the button on my vambraces and smiled as my shield extended.

Thor nodded and stepped forward, climbing to the top of the small hill, the destroyer just at the base of it. I held the shield in front of myself, getting ready to jump and protect Thor.

“Brother! Please!” He called out, his arms outstretched. “There is no reason for this! Please, recall the Destroyer and let me come home so I may talk with you directly! There is no need for-”

For a short moment it almost seemed like the large metallic humanoid was going to just stand there, listening to Thor's speech. But the head slowly opened and began to glow, cutting him off. With a dull metallic humming a beam of orange and yellow energy fired out of the Destroyer's face, aimed squarely at Thor.

With a shout I shoved Thor out of the way, brought up my shield and angled it away from us. The beam slammed into my shield, heat washing over me as my feet dug furrows in the dirt. But instead of detonating against my shield it was deflected, the beam hurtling off over the hill.

“Holy shit!” I cursed, my arms shaking under the strain of deflecting the blast.

The Destroyer hardly even paused, the hole it had fired from glowing again, another blast crossing the distance between us. This time I was ready and braced myself against my shield for extra support, allowing me to free my other arm. I carded the glove off my hand and as the beam of brutal energy slammed into me I swung my arm around and pushed it in.

I screamed as my bare hand was burned by the heat, but managed to remember to pull. Instantly the beam vanished, a card now in my hand. I smirked, even as my hand smoked, the skin cracked and bleeding from the powerful energy blast. Thankfully I could already feel my hand starting to heal, the damage slowly fading until my hand was usable, though still in considerable pain.

“Thor! Get to cover!” I shouted, my voice cracking in pain, though still spotting Ema peaking above a hill behind the Destroyer.

Thor nodded and stumbled upright, running behind the hill. As soon as he started to move the Destroyer's focus shifted back to him, forcing me to block another blast of energy as the metal behemoth stepped towards us. The beam was angled down this time, meaning that even as I carded it, my hand now blackened on my finger tips, the beam slammed into the hill next to me, exploding and sending Thor and I flying across the hill and him over it. I groaned as I slammed into the ground, stunned by the explosion and impact.

The pain in my fingers was dull but getting worse as my healing amulet fixed the nerves that had been damaged. My shield sizzled next to me, burning the bush I had partially landed on. I started to get up, only for the shadow of the Destroyer to loom over me. It raised its foot and attempted to stomp on me, barely stopped by my shield as I managed to get it between us. The

mass of metal pushed down on me, slowly overwhelming my strength. I struggled for a moment before freeing my arm, putting my damaged hand on its foot and pulling.

The destroyer didn't budge.

I tried again, and again letting out a crushed shout as it started to grind me into the ground.

"Fuck! Ema!" I called out. "Could use some-"

I barely got her name out before she stood up from her small hill behind the Destroyer. She pulled back and fired, the arrow slamming into the destroyer's head, exploding and knocking it around slightly. She immediately fired again, and again, first an ice arrow encasing its head and a second arrow exploding into chains and knocking it even more off center. With a loud grunt I heaved under its foot, slowly pushing it back up, forcing the metal construct to stumble backwards to stay upright. I scrambled back to my feet, my shield smoking as I brought it back up in front of me.

The Destroyer struggled for a moment before the ice and chains snapped and fell to the ground, turning to Ema and firing off another blast. Thankfully she dived back, stretching out inhumanly to throw herself behind the hill. The beam of energy slammed into the ground where she had been, detonating and throwing dust, dirt and rocks everywhere.

"Loki! This will never work! Only an idiot would follow you!" I said, calling out to the Destroyer to keep its focus on me, guessing at Loki's intentions. "Even if the plan went flawlessly, do you really think that the people of Asgard wouldn't rebel? You'd be a horrible king and they would never follow you for long!"

The destroyer whirled on me, moving faster than it had before, its face glowing once again. The beam of energy slammed into my shield and I barely managed to deflect it upwards, carding the blast again. Once again the tips of my fingers were charred and I couldn't help but scream out. I stumbled, falling to one knee as the Destroyer's face cannon glowed and... the beam went wide as Lady Sif slammed into its back, her elongated sword pushing through its neck and pinning it to the ground, the hulking metal giant bent at the waist. The fire that lit its insides faded.

The warriors three, standing not far behind, cheered in victory as Lady Sif stood on top of the Destroyer, smirking and holding her fist up. I watched with a smile, shaking out my hand as it slowly healed, burning as the cracked and blistered skin slowly healed. I took a single step to them before freezing, watching as the Destroyer slowly relit and started morphing, shifting until it was bent over backwards, and Lady Sif was standing on its chest.

"Sif!" Thor shouted as the warrior woman half jumped off and was half flung away as the Destroyer stood back up.

Lady Sif tumbled after slamming into the ground, the Destroyer already bringing its face cannon to bear. It glowed brighter before an arrow slammed into its shoulder, this time making it stumble forward. The beam of energy still fired from its face, slamming into the ground by its feet. It exploded and sent the behemoth back, stumbling and falling onto its rear. Thor rushed from his hiding spot to Lady Sif's side.

"Ema! Buy them some time!"

Arrow after arrow slammed into the Destroyer's side, ice encasing its head, chains wrapping around his arms and legs. The behemoth easily broke through, but each time it took a moment of focus.

"Use the tank killers!" I called out.

The barrage of arrows shifted halted for a moment, then rapid fire three of the tank killer arrows slammed into its shoulder. The sound of screeching metal, like an unlubricated drill being forced through metal, echoed across the battlefield. When I looked, three barely noticeable divots had been drilled into its shoulder. The Destroyer whirled and focused on Ema, who immediately dived back. With the Destroyer intent on finding Ema, Thor helped Sif over a hill, the warriors three joining them at a sprint. I followed close behind, diving and rolling over the top of the rocky and now burnt hill.

"Come sneak around to us Ema." I said into my helmet before rushing to the Asgardians. When I got to the group Thor was already standing tall.

"I have a plan Maker. We can't hope to stop the Destroyer ourselves, and if we hide, Loki will start rampaging through your home until we step forward. My friends must return home to stop Loki himself. Would you please take them to the Bifrost?"

"Of course, what is your plan?" I asked, already having a sinking feeling in my gut. "Thor-

"Do not worry, please just focus on getting my friends home." He said emphatically, smiling when I hesitantly nod in agreement.

"Thank you, please tell Lady Jane that she... Tell her she is in my heart."

Thor stepped away, Lady Sif's shield in his hand. The four other Asgardians got closer, waiting for me to lead them to the truck, with Ema bounding around to join us.

"Loki!"

Thor called out, standing on the top of the hill, holding Sif's shield in his hand, letting it fall to the ground. He held his arms out to, clearly not attempting to attack or defend himself. We could hear the metal behemoth climbing the hill, stopping a few feet away from the blonde asgardian.

“I do not know why you are doing this, what has happened to make you wish me dead. But if my life is the cost to keep you from hurting my friends, to keep you from rampaging through Midgard... Then take it!”

For a moment the Destroyer stood still, staring down at the mortal Asgardian before punching him in the chest, sending him flying backwards, slamming into the ground at least forty feet away.

“Thor!”

Jane Foster, newly arrived and stumbling out of her all-terrain vehicle, made a bee line for Thor, as did Lady Sif and the other Asgardians. I ran to stand in front of him, my slowly cooling shield up and ready to defend from the Destroyer's next attack. Instead the metal behemoth turned around and began walking away. When I was certain it wasn't going to come back I turned, already pulling off my necklace... only to find Jane crying over his broken and still body.

“Jane!” Erik Selvig shouted, pointing up.

Everyone followed his finger, a black dot flying upwards at an alarming speed, breaking through the sound barrier. After a moment it reached the apex of its flight, curving down and hurtling towards us.

I turned to watch Selvig pulling Jane away from Thor, the woman struggling slightly but eventually letting him move her. I looked up in time to watch Mjolnir plummet to the ground and slam into Thor's now outstretched hand.

From the heavens slammed a bolt of lightning, striking Mjolnir and traveling through Thor. In a moment he was upright inside the lighting, electricity sparking out all around him, digging furrows in the ground and even reaching me. I reached out my still red and throbbing hand, letting the bolts of electricity dance and run through my body. I carded it over and over again, adding fourteen sparks to my deck before the outward sparking tapered off. Each one sent jolts of pain up my arm, making me grit my teeth and tremble. I watched as Thor transformed into his full Asgardian form. Armor formed around his body, half hidden by the blinding light of the lightning. When the lightning was finally over Thor stood strong, hammer held high, completely healed. The sky grew dark and Thor cried out.

“LOKI!”

With a single leap Thor was on top of the hill, calling down a massive lightning bolt onto the Destroyer, knocking it back before it could even turn around. In a flash he was on it, smashing it in the gut with his hammer, staggering the banded metal humanoid construct to its knee before hitting it again, causing it to fall back out of view behind the hill. He followed after it with determined purpose, a steady but intimidating walk full of calm and cold confidence.

I struggled to move, my muscles barely following orders even as my amulet started to heal me. With a grunt I collapsed my shield and stumbled, only for Ema to catch me and help me stand. I nodded to her and we walked slowly to the top, looking down as Thor batted aside a blast of energy from the Destroyer. He did it again and again before spinning his hammer once and hurling it, catching the metal construct in the chin. He called his hammer back, this time smashing into its shoulder, knocking it off center. Seeing the construct in an awkward angle Thor roared, leaped into the air and brought his lightning charged hammer down, the blow aimed precisely where the tank killer arrows had drilled three tiny divots.

When it struck a metallic thunder echoed through the desert, the impact sending a shockwave that pushed everyone watching on the hill back a step. The blow drove the construct to its knees, and when the lightning dissipated I could see a deep gash in its banded metal shoulder. Thor smashed it again and again, widening the wound until the arm barely hung on. With another cry he lifted his hammer to the now darkened sky and called down a final lightning bolt, slamming it into the gap in the armor. The once orange and yellow internal lighting went electric blue as lightning pummeled the interior. After a moment there was an explosion, kicking up dust and sending rocks and debris scattering along the small valley.

When the dust and smoke settled Thor was walking back towards the group, the Destroyer armor a wreck behind them, its arm strewn a half dozen feet away from the rest of the body. As Thor walked by with a smile and a nod, I stood a bit steadier, making my way down to the wreck, my healing amulet doing good work. When I stood above it, I kicked the metal behemoth in the side, pausing for a moment as the rest of the group talked behind me. I bent down and tried to pull the arm into a card, smiling as it worked.

“Are you going to take the main body too?”

“No. I doubt Shield would let me just walk away with that.” I explained after a pause. “They might let the arm slide.”

I stood and returned to the group, flexing my fingers as the dull agonizing ache started to fade. Thor turned to face me, his arm around Jane's shoulders.

“Please, Maker, could you bring my friends to the Bifrost site?” He asked. “I must fly there now, every moment could be precious.”

“Of course Thor, we are right behind you.”

He nodded and spun Mjolnir up and lifted from the ground, Jane in his arms as he flew away quickly.

“Yeah... definitely figuring out flight next.” I said quietly, though Ema chuckled next to me.

"I'll put it on the list." She responded.

It took ten minutes for us to drive to the Bifrost site, with Lady Sif sitting next to me, providing directions. When we arrived Thor was still there, shouting to the heavens and looking anxious.

"Hiemdall, he isn't responding." He explained as we joined him around the intricate design that seemed to mark where the bifrost made contact with earth.

"That's... not good?" I said with a frown. "Does that mean...?"

"We are stranded." Hogunn finished simply while Thor continued to shout.

"Maybe he is just a bit held up?" Darcy suggested. "Visiting the little Asgardians room?"

Before anyone could comment on that the sky lit up and a beam of translucent rainbow energy shot down and slammed into the ground. Volstagg and Fandral both gave out a cry of happiness, rushing around us mortals to enter the stream. I followed them, not stepping in but walking around the outside. The energy coming off of the bridge was palpable, a thrumming in my chest and bones. I knelt and reached out, my bare hand passing through curly wisps of that power. Rapid fire I carded a bunch of the wisps of energy, ending up with twenty two cards before I took a step back and walked back to the rest of the group. Thor gave me a nod before stepping into the beam of energy, the whole group disappearing upwards into the beam with a flash of light.

With a long groan I flicked out my chair and sat back in it, letting out a deep sigh of relief as I did. Jane and her team only looked up into the dark revolving storm clouds, as if expecting him back any moment. I looked up at Ema as she joined me, standing next to me with her hand on the back of my seat.

"So... are we just going to wait until they come back?" She asked in my helmet.

"For a while at least." I said with a shrug before looking back at the other three. "Give Coulson a buzz on the radio, tell him where we are. These guys are going to need one hell of a debrief."