

## The Titan's Captive

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/14889474) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/14889474>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
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Category:	<a href="#">F/M</a>
Fandoms:	<a href="#">Marvel Cinematic Universe</a> , <a href="#">The Avengers (Marvel Movies)</a> , <a href="#">The Avengers (Marvel) - All Media Types</a> , <a href="#">Iron Man (Movies)</a> , <a href="#">Captain America (Movies)</a> , <a href="#">Thor (Movies)</a> , <a href="#">Guardians of the Galaxy (Movies)</a>
Relationships:	<a href="#">Pepper Potts/Tony Stark</a> , <a href="#">Tony Stark &amp; Thanos</a> , <a href="#">Steve Rogers &amp; Tony Stark</a> , <a href="#">Tony Stark &amp; Everyone</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Tony Stark</a> , <a href="#">Thanos</a> , <a href="#">Steve Rogers</a> , <a href="#">Thor</a> , <a href="#">Natasha Romanov (Marvel)</a> , <a href="#">Clint Barton</a> , <a href="#">Bruce Banner</a> , <a href="#">Vision</a> , <a href="#">Wanda Maximoff</a> , <a href="#">James "Rhodey" Rhodes</a> , <a href="#">Sam Wilson (Marvel)</a> , <a href="#">James "Bucky" Barnes</a> , <a href="#">T'Challa (Marvel)</a> , <a href="#">Okoye (Marvel)</a> , <a href="#">Peter Quill</a> , <a href="#">Drax the Destroyer</a> , <a href="#">Mantis (Marvel)</a> , <a href="#">Groot (Marvel)</a> , <a href="#">Rocket Raccoon</a> , <a href="#">Stephen Strange</a> , <a href="#">Peter Parker</a> , <a href="#">Pepper Potts</a> , <a href="#">Happy Hogan</a> , <a href="#">Nebula (Marvel)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Hurt Tony Stark</a> , <a href="#">Tony Stark Needs a Hug</a> , <a href="#">Avengers: Infinity War Part 1 (Movie) Spoilers</a> , <a href="#">Canon Divergence - Avengers: Infinity War Part 1 (Movie)</a> , <a href="#">Angst</a> , <a href="#">Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Protective Steve Rogers</a> , <a href="#">BAMF Avengers</a> , <a href="#">BAMF Pepper Potts</a> , <a href="#">Amputation</a> , <a href="#">Limb removal</a> , <a href="#">Don't copy to another site</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2018-06-09 Completed: 2019-04-17 Words: 31,766 Chapters: 12/12

# The Titan's Captive

by [the\\_writer1988](#)

## Summary

Thanos brings Tony to Wakanda with him and gives an ultimatum to the Avengers: the Mind Stone for Stark.

## Notes

I've seen quite a few stories with his type of scenario, but have yet to continue, so I decided to write my own!

The idea of Thanos taking Tony to Wakanda with him is interesting because it opens up a different path for all the characters to take.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

# The Ultimatum

## TITAN

The Gauntlet hand rested on his head, heavy upon his skull, but holding him gently. He had trouble breathing as Thanos loosened his hand upon the sword still embedded within Tony's left side. Pierced through his body in one swift stroke, the Titan had driven it in further as he'd pushed Tony back to sit on the rocks behind him. The Titan gently tilted Tony's head back. Reluctantly, he raised his eyes to stare into the orbs of the one that had killed him.

"You have my respect, Stark," said Thanos, gently. "When I'm done, half of humanity will still be alive."

He was shoved back, the movement pulling at the wound. Tony whimpered, struggling to breathe, still winded. Pain coursed through his body and he spat out blood.

"I hope they remember you."

Tony looked up.

Thanos had raised the Gauntlet, the four stones embedded within it, all glowing in unison. The Titan tilted his head to the side, as if contemplating his next action.

Turning his head away, Tony waited for the inevitable. He hoped it would be quick. He doubted it would be painless.

"STOP!"

Tony lifted his head and looked at his companion.

Strange was getting himself into a sitting position, looking defeated. There was a pause as Thanos looked at the wizard. "Spare his life."

*No... Don't let him win to save me.*

"And I will give you the stone."

The Gauntlet was still pointed at Tony. "No tricks." The Titan's demands were simple.

Strange shook his head.

The Gauntlet moved to point at the wizard.

"Don't!" Tony didn't want this. If Thanos killing him meant he lost then he'd rather die.

But Tony's plea didn't stop Strange.

The green stone materialised into the air, summoned by the wizard and Strange floated it towards Thanos, watching the Titan intently.

Thanos took the stone between his fingers, looking down at Tony before inserting the stone into the thumb slot of the Gauntlet.

Tony couldn't help but watch as Thanos shuddered as power visibly engulfed him. He seemed to grow stronger and Tony's danger sense went through the roof. This wasn't over.

Thanos smiled. "One to go..."

Then, from over a ridge, Quill came, propelled by his jet boots, towards Thanos, firing quickly, before Thanos stepped aside, lashing out at the man, sending him sprawling into the dirt, dazing him, with a quick fist to his face.

"A shame you still resist. You've lost."

Quill did not move, but Tony would see the rise and fall of his chest.

"I thank you, Wizard, for your generous exchange for the stone."

Thanos' expression did not make Tony feel any better, not when the Titan moved towards him, reaching out to place his hand upon Tony's head. The Gauntlet fingers stroked through his hair; Tony's breathing stilled, terror flooding his body.

Attempting to pull away did no favours.

Thanos gripped his head hard.

Strange was on his feet. "There is no trick. You said you'd spare his life."

Thanos chuckled.

The sound terrified Tony.

"I didn't promise to leave him here, did I?"

Tony's eyes widened. "No! Do-"

And he felt Thanos drag him back by the skull into a portal. His vision swam and the last thing he saw was Strange's horrified expression.

And Tony knew that whatever plan Strange had, had failed.

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## **WAKANDA**

Steve could sense the change in the air. A few leaves fell from the trees, scattering down in front of him. His hair whipped back from the breeze as it grew stronger. Moving his hand to

the com-device in his ear, Steve issued a command. "Everyone on my position. We have incoming."

It only took brief seconds for them to arrive at Steve's position. They had all been rushing to save Vision: Steve, Sam, Wanda, Rhodey, Bruce in the Hulkbuster, Natasha, Bucky, T'Challa, Okoye, Groot and the racoon. They were united in one common goal.

Then the wind become more intense towards a certain spot in the forest and a dark blue cloud appeared.

Steve clenched his fist tighter, aware that everything had been heading towards this.

A figure stepped through, taller than any of them, his skin purple, his muscles bulging, and as the cloud disappeared around them, Steve's eyes zeroed in, not on Thanos, but at the figure he clutched by the head, held by the Gauntlet hand.

"Tony..." Steve breathed.

He heard similar intake of breaths around him.

Tony's expression was bunched up in pain, as if he was just waking up. His eyes were fluttering and he could see he was becoming more aware of his surroundings. Tony's face was bloody and the suit partially ripped from him, but what made Steve gasp in horror was the sword, still embedded through the man's abdomen, skewing him through. There was blood dripping from his mouth. Every gasp of air caused pain.

"This is what happens to those that resist me," stated Thanos, squeezing Tony's head.

Tony cried out.

"Leave him alone." Steve stepped forward, his expression hard.

The Titan smirked. "Why should I when he obviously means something to you?" The Titan moved Tony's head up. "He fought well. The other Stone-Keeper gave me his in return for this one's life. I wonder what you will do."

Steve panted, looking at the others. He dare not attack, not with Tony in the hands of their enemy. "We will never give you the stone."

"Really?" Thanos cocked his head to the side. "No matter what I do to him?" One stone in the Gauntlet activated: the purple one brightened and Tony started to scream. His body flayed in the Titan's grip and more blood spurted from his mouth and where the sword was, it lodged in further.

It lasted barely ten seconds.

"Will you not reconsider?"

Steve glanced at the others. One of their own was being used against them. They couldn't let Vision die, but equally they couldn't allow Thanos to have Tony either. Vision's own gaze

was fixed on Tony's limp and bloody body.

Tony coughed up more blood. His brown eyes focused on Steve.

They hadn't spoken in a few years.

"St....St...Steve..." Tony managed, breathless, his face still contorted in pain. "Do... Do... Don't..."

Steve swallowed. "Tony..."

"I'm waiting for your answer," interrupted Thanos, darkly.

Steve steeled his gaze, clenching his shield closer to his body. "We do not trade lives." It was what Tony wanted.

"A pity." The Titan settled his gaze upon them all.

Feeling unnerved, Steve stepped back towards Vision.

"I would hate to hurt him more," said Thanos, moving his Gauntlet-free hand to touch Tony's bloody cheek, gently stroking the skin there.

Tony shuddered and tried to move his head away.

"He has my respect. It will be a pity to kill him..."

"If he has your respect, then why use him against us?" Natasha asked, her voice hard and unforgiving.

"Because you have what I want. One life for a life. Only one of you here has the right to make that choice." Thanos' eyes focused upon Vision. "But if you choose to protect him, then this one here," he shook Tony, "will suffer."

Steve saw Tony shake his head. "No."

Thanos' expression turned dark. "Then, he shall suffer."

And the Titan was gone, dragging Tony with him, away through a portal he conjured behind them.

Steve leapt forward but fell through the cloud on to the forest floor. He looked around at the others. Rhodey's face was pale, and Bruce looked visibly shaken by what they had just witnessed. Steve couldn't rise from his position on the earth, shock coursing through him. "Oh god. What have I done?"

**To be continued...**

# The Idea

## Chapter Summary

Steve and the others contemplate their next actions, Peter and Strange bargain with the Guardians of the Galaxy, and Tony finds himself in Thanos' command ship....

## Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the comments! I will try to update regularly and I am very pleased people like this concept!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### TITAN

Peter Parker landed on all fours in front of Strange. “Where is he? Where did he take Mr Stark? He stabbed him... didn’t he?” He stood to his full height, worry enriched on his features.

Strange took in several deep breaths. He was still winded from his fight with Thanos. “It went wrong. What I saw... I did what I thought would lead us to the winning future.”

Peter stepped back. “What? You mean you tried to set us on the one path where we win?” He remembered Strange confirming that there was one future where they won.

Strange bowed his head. “Yes. I tried. Saving Stark was the crux of it. If I allowed him to die here, there wouldn’t be a future where we win. He was supposed to be left here with us.” Carefully he started to climb to his feet. “But Thanos didn’t do what I expected.”

Peter tried to hold it together. He was fearful for Mr Stark, worried for him considering the injury inflicted upon him by their enemy. “Did he know?”

Strange winced, getting to his feet. “He may have realised once I gave him the Time Stone. He could have used it in seconds and I would never know... We need to gather the others and, if we can, return home with their aid. We may not be on the winning path any longer, but there is no point in just sitting back and letting Thanos win. We could still set ourselves along a path where things are fixable, but not completely.”

“Are you just saying that to make me feel better?” asked Peter meekly.

Strange didn’t reply, just gave him a knowing look.

Peter didn't need an answer now. He felt numb, scared and worried all at once. He hadn't been able to save Mr Stark. He'd failed... Where was he now? What would Thanos do to him? Peter didn't want to consider the thought.

"Urgh... Did... did we... lose?" Quill's voice was small and soft as he woke from unconsciousness from where Thanos had flung him.

Peter felt angry. He'd seen what had happened when Quill had lost it. "This wouldn't have happened if you'd just let us get that Gauntlet off before hitting him in the face!"

"He killed Gamora!" retorted Quill angrily.

"I DON'T CARE!" screamed Peter. "We could've beaten him! I was this close! Mr Stark wouldn't have been stabbed and taken by him either!" He felt mean shouting at Quill who had obviously lost someone he loved, but so had Peter. He cared for Mr Stark. He didn't want to lose him.

"Yelling at one another is not going to help matters," interrupted Strange. "What's done is done. The future I saw depended on Quill losing it. The future I saw depended on Thanos taking my bargain and leaving Stark here. I could have stopped Quill from reacting, Peter, but I chose not to because I was trying to set us on the right path."

"We were always meant to fail?" squeaked Peter.

Strange bowed his head. "Yes. Thanos was supposed to win."

Quill pursed his lips. "What can we do?" He glanced at Drax and Mantis who had now joined them, looking a bit worse for wear but intact. Nebula still stood to the side.

"Nothing. He will win," muttered Nebula.

"Quill, we need your help." Strange glanced around at them all. "We need to return to Earth and regroup with the other Avengers. There may be some hope. I appreciate you lost someone you love. I cannot promise anything. But if we are to try to fix things, even if it turns out to be useless, we need to try. And we need to stick together."

Quill mulled for a bit.

"We should help," replied Mantis.

"Ok," he finally acquiesced. "But before we go to Earth, I want to give Gamora a proper burial. Wherever she is, she deserves that much."

Strange nodded. "I think we can accommodate that."

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## **WAKANDA**

"Was that - ? Did we just - ?" Bruce stammered over the questions forming on his lips.



Steve felt numb. “He’s got Tony... How?” He looked at the others surrounding him.

“Tony left on a spaceship,” said Bruce. “He went after Doctor Strange. Wherever that ship was taking him must have been on a course for Thanos. They clearly fought, Steve, and Tony lost. Badly.”

“He was stabbed through the abdomen!” said Rhodey, woefully. “How? And we just let him take him...”

“We can’t give up Vision. Tony didn’t want us to,” said Natasha. “You saw him. He’s ready for this. He knows what’s coming. He’s ready to pay the price.”

“What if I don’t want him to?” Vision’s voice rose above them all.

“Vis?” Wanda asked. “What do you mean? You can’t – Not for... for... him!”

Steve shifted on the earth to look at the android. Vision’s back was against the stump of a tree and he’d been stabbed twice. He looked weak and tired.

“Wanda... I know you’ve never liked Mr Stark,” began Vision, “but he was never at fault for what happened to your parents. That was Obediah Stane, his business partner. You’ve hated the wrong man for years. The last two years since the Avengers broke apart, he has always known where you’ve been but he’s left you in peace. You’ve been allowed to roam and he has constantly protected you from Ross.”

“Tony was right,” noted Natasha quietly. “We needed to stay together. We didn’t. He always saw this coming. That’s why he stayed on the side of the Accords. Becoming fugitives hasn’t helped any of us.”

“It wasn’t the main reason, Natasha,” interrupted Rhodey. “The Accords were going to happen regardless. Agreeing to them would have meant we could make changes. Tony tried to explain... He has a lot of political influence...” He shook his head. “Let’s not dwell on that. Tony has been taken by Thanos. Vision, this choice is on you. Neither of us can make it.”

“We cannot let him get all the stones,” said Bruce.

“But can we allow Tony to suffer?” countered Natasha.

“He wanted to,” muttered Steve. He glanced at Bucky. No one should have to suffer in such a way and there would be no telling what Thanos would do to Tony.

“We need to regroup,” said T’Challa, stepping forward. “Count our losses and strategize. Shuri can continue trying to remove the stone from your head. After that...” He trailed off.

Then, from above, came a loud cry and Thor thundered down. “Where is Thanos?”

Steve climbed to his feet but the racoon spoke first, who clearly looked like he didn’t want to listen through another conversation.

“Purple guy came with skinny broken human, then left again.”

“That’s not even all the details.” Bucky rolled his eyes.

“Better than having a long-arsed explanation again,” Rocket said, lifting his gun slightly.

Steve sighed. They were getting nowhere. “Thanos was here. He has Tony.”

“Stark?”

Steve nodded. “Yeah. He offered us his life in exchange for Vision. We... refused. Tony wanted us to. Thanos left stating only one of us has the right to make that choice.”

“We cannot give him the stone,” said Thor darkly.

“It is my choice alone,” said Vision. “I’ve known Mr Stark for years. Not just as ‘Vision’ but I remember being his A.I. I cannot willingly sit here knowing that he is suffering for my choice alone. But I also realise we cannot give Thanos the stone. As T’Challa has suggested, we need to regroup and find a way to remove the stone from my head without killing me. That way, the choice of whether to give up the stone for Mr Stark, will then lay with all of us, not just me.”

He said it with such softness and clarity that Steve felt a little bit of hope blossom inside him. “Then let us return to the Palace. Do what we can to help and hope we can save Tony without giving up the stone. No matter what has happened between us, he is still my friend and he is still a part of this team.”

Steve cast his gaze around at them all, settling his gaze on Wanda. “We will not fail him.”

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## **SANCTUARY II**

The portal opened up in Thanos’ personal warship, Sanctuary II. The Titan stepped out into the throne room, dragging his limp but slightly struggling captive along. Gently, he lowered the human into a sitting position on the floor. Grasping the edge of the sword that was still embedded within the human’s abdomen, Thanos pulled it out slowly, almost tenderly. He held Stark by the head still, watching as his prisoner’s eyes widened in pain and horror.

The human didn’t scream. Admirable.

He did whimper, however.

Discarding the bloody sword away from his trembling captive, Thanos tipped Stark’s head back. “Welcome to my humble abode, Stark.”

Stark struggled to breathe, holding one hand against the wound in his side. “You... call... this... humble?” He coughed up blood, spitting it onto the floor. “More... like... a... prison.”

Thanos smirked. “Your prison. My home.”

“Won’t... be... for... long,” glared Stark, moving his hand away from the abdomen wound. The sword had mostly cauterised the wound but droplets of blood still ran down the torn tissue. The sword had gone straight through the human’s body. The black tracksuit the human wore obscured the leaking blood from his back.

“You will live, I can assure you of that. You are far more useful to me alive than dead,” said Thanos. “At least for now.”

There was a flash of fear reflecting in Stark’s eyes. “They won’t trade,” he managed.

Thanos raised the Gauntlet, using the Power stone to lift Stark into the air. “They will.”

The human tried to struggle against the invisible grip of the Gauntlet. “We’re not even friends. They don’t like me and I don’t like them.”

Thanos smirked. He didn’t believe that one bit. They may have had conflict but several of the so-called Avengers clearly cared for Stark. He was their weak link. “Their reactions said otherwise.”

Stark spat more blood. “I’m not important.”

“You are. Otherwise the stone-keeper would not have bargained for your life.” Thanos began to walk from the throne room, leading Stark away. “You will not die of your wounds here. You will survive to serve my greater mission.”

“No, I won’t,” grated Stark.

Thanos reached for the floating man beside him, grabbing his skull and twisting his head so their eyes met. “You will. I can promise you that, Stark.”

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Stark’s wounds were healing. He had no use for an injured prisoner.

Despite his injury, Stark had put up a fight against the guards in the medbay before they’d managed to sedate him. His efforts had resulted in the injury in his abdomen tearing and causing more damage to his internal organs. Thanos wanted Stark alive. It was necessary to allow the human to heal, but it grated that he was unable to follow through on his threat to the other Avengers on Earth that their team-mate would suffer if they did not surrender the final Infinity Stone to him.

Not that they knew Stark was not suffering.

Thanos studied the unconscious human. This was the man who had defeated his Chitauri army all those years ago, the one who had prevented the Trickster from returning with the Space stone. Stark was an interesting specimen from his race. Humans were generally not worth knowing. Their species was insignificant within the grand scale of the universe. He’d only met two humans he considered worthy of his attention.

The first, being the human who had courted his Gamora. He'd had the guts to follow through on a promise to kill her, though Thanos had ultimately thwarted him, the human had, had merit in having the strength to pull that trigger. Yes, Quill was worthy of his attention. It would be a shame to kill him if it came to it. Still, Quill would be reunited with his loved one in death soon enough. Perhaps that was the best fate for him.

Stark, on the other hand, he was something special, something unique. His mind was especially brilliant. He was an adversary worth having. Stark could be dangerous. He was motivated by fear and a desire to save his homeworld. They were very similar in that regard. Stark had carried on fighting, even when it was clear he was going to lose, even when Thanos was tearing pieces of his suit from him. The only reason he was determined to kill Stark with four Infinity Stones instead of just one was to ensure he did die and not become a problem in the future.

But the wizard's bargain had offered another solution: one that did suit Thanos better.

He could still use Stark, could perhaps keep him when this was all over. He may be a worthy adversary but he also had the potential to be an ally.

The human slept peacefully from the sedation he was under.

Thanos reached out and stroked down the human's face.

Once the human was well rested, they would begin.

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

Writing in Thanos' POV was really difficult and scary.

The next chapter will be posted next week at some point...

# Worthy

## Chapter Summary

Peter and Strange travel to Vormir with the Guardians, Steve and Bucky have a talk and Tony... well, Tony is in the hands of Thanos.

## Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the reviews so far! I have no idea how long this story will be but I think it is going to be quite a long one...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### DEEP SPACE

“Where are we going?” asked Peter. “What planet?” He was trying not to think of Tony; preferred to keep his mind focused on what they were doing. He needed his wits about him if they were going to rescue Tony.

The blue robotic woman answered. “Vormir. It’s where the Soul Stone was hidden until my sister told Thanos where it was. She did it to save me. And she paid for it with her life.” Her voice was harsh, despite the essence of sadness reflecting in her words.

Peter wasn’t sure whether to be sad or not for her. She seemed so indifferent to what had happened to her sister that he did wonder if she really cared. “How long will it take to get there?” They’d crossed the galaxy to Titan in the matter of hours from Earth. The technology Peter had seen demonstrated how far behind Earth was in advancement. It would be years before they reached that level, perhaps not even Mr Stark would live to see the Earth develop technology that could take them out into the stars.

His chest hurt. He’d thought of Mr Stark. “Don’t think of him.” It was better not to. All Peter wished to do was go after him. Yet there was no way he could, not when this ‘Star Lord’ was in control and hell bent on finding his girlfriend. Peter could understand the loss he must have suffered at hearing of her death and he did agree with wanting to retrieve her body but a little bit of him did think they could be one step closer to rescuing Mr Stark than not at all.

Leaning back against the wall, Peter tried to rest his eyes. He was tired, numb and exhausted. They’d fought a long and arduous battle on Titan and he felt like he had nearly reached his limits. There was a shuffle of movement next to him.

The Doctor Strange man was sitting beside him now. He was scrutinising Peter, his eyes piercing as if he was peering deep into Peter's soul.

"You need to rest. You'll need it."

Peter swallowed. "I can't. My mind... it just keeps going..."

Strange watched him carefully. "I would rather return to Earth, the same as you. But going to this other planet will not delay us too much. They are our only ride home."

"I know," said Peter wistfully. "I just wish..." He shook his head. "Never mind."

"I know you want Stark here but if you want to save him..." Strange trailed off.

Peter closed his eyes. "I know..." He was very tired.

Perhaps he could rest, even if it was only for a short while.

A few minutes later, Peter was asleep, only helped along by a bit of Doctor Strange's magic.

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## **WAKANDA**

Steve stood, staring out into the Wakandan forest from the hallway just outside from the throne room where Shuri was working on removing the Mind Stone from Vision. Wanda was with him too.

Steve still felt in shock over the choice they had been given. The stone for Tony. They couldn't give it to Thanos. There was no possibility in which they could do so.

"Steve?"

Turning, he saw Bucky walking towards him.

"Buck..." A slight smile came on Steve's face.

"You're thinking about it, aren't you?"

Bucky could always read him. "Yeah, I am." Steve turned away and leaned his forehead against the window. "We just let him take Tony. What type of a person am I to allow that to happen?"

"We didn't have a choice," replied Bucky, placing an arm on Steve's shoulder in a gesture of comfort. "What could we have done? That Thanos had all the cards in his hands. We couldn't fight him. Steve... he has power none of us understand. We'd die facing him."

"Maybe that would have been for the better," replied Steve. "At least we would have tried. But Tony... If he hadn't had Tony..." It was hard to grasp the reality of their situation.

“You know it says a lot about the rest of the team if they are all equally shocked about this turn of events that they are not using the time to slag off Stark,” noted Bucky reasonably. “They all blamed him at one point or another for their own situations after the Accords. It shows they still care for him.”

Steve sighed. “We all forget Vision is a part of a former AI of Tony’s. JARVIS was truly exceptional. Tony was devastated when he lost him. We do not give Vision enough credit. He cares for Tony too but he doesn’t know how to show it. He learns with everything he does.” Steve moved back. His head dropped low. “I just... don’t know what to do.”

Bucky gripped his shoulder. “I know things in Siberia didn’t end well. It’s been two years since you’ve said a word to one another.”

“I hope there will be more words between us.” Steve hated the idea he and Tony would never reconcile, especially if this ended with Thanos killing Tony.

“We’ll work towards that goal.” Bucky shook his head. “I came here with news actually.”

“Oh?” Steve raised an eyebrow in question.

“Rhodey reported in from New York.”

Rhodey had left Wakanda pretty quickly to check on his friends back home. Despite Tony’s predicament, they needed someone who could provide them with intelligence on the current state of affairs, especially as three separate alien attacks had happened all over the world in a space of a few hours. Newscasts were chaotic and it was difficult for the Avengers to collect information.

“The President is demanding the Avengers come forward to explain the current situation and what happened. They detected large amounts of energy directed at Wakanda. They want answers. Rhodey is liaising with them and to see if we can return to America. He says when he returns here he will be bringing a woman called Pepper Potts with him? I don’t know her.”

“Pepper is Tony’s fiancée,” clarified Steve.

That would be a difficult conversation: telling Pepper her fiancé was in the hands of an alien warlord. He felt relieved it wouldn’t be his duty to do so. He was sure Pepper would have plenty enough words to say to him when they met.

It was nice to see Bucky being so optimistic about the future. “We’ll get through this, Steve.”

“Even Tony?” Steve didn’t want to have doubts but where the genius was, wasn’t promising in the slightest.

“All of us.”

## **VORMIR**

They approached the mountain range. Mantis and Peter had remained behind on the Guardian’s ship. The kid had hardly woken since Strange had used a tiny bit of magic to urge

the boy to sleep. He'd need it. The next few week hours, days were going to be tough on all of them.

Strange had spent the time between Titan and Vormir trying to figure out where he had gone wrong. He'd allowed things to play out as they should. He'd seen one future where they could win. Stark was integral to their win. That was why he had offered the Time Stone for Stark's life. But Thanos' actions had caused a problem with the path Strange had been trying to set them on.

He still needed more time to think about it. He would need to talk to the Avengers once they were back on Earth. He wondered how much he should reveal to them. I should be dead by now.

Strange had seen his own death in the one path where they won. Strange hadn't seen how that path had led to the win. He'd seen himself dying in the snap, and then the next moment returning to life to see Stark wielding a new Infinity Gauntlet, clenching his fist and mastering the use of all the Stones to reverse what Thanos had done and then end the Titan for good.

Strange had not seen how Stark had reached that point where he could wield all the Stones, only that it was the endgame. And for that to happen, Thanos needed to win and complete his goal and for Tony to survive. Seeing him about to be killed, murdered by the Titan he feared, had caused Strange to offer the stone in the hope of setting them on the path they required to be.

His efforts had been in vain.

Thanos had taken the deal and then taken Stark with him.

*Does he know how important Stark is?*

He couldn't keep making guesses.

They transcended up a narrow mountain path, coming closer to the top. It was in a narrow cavern that they came across a figure in black robes. Red-skinned and skull-like the creature conversed with Quill as he sought to learn the location of where this Gamora's body lay.

The creature led them further up the path until they came close to the top of the mountain. The creature pointed down into the cavern below.

Strange watched as Quill approached the edge and looked down.

"Gamora..." He turned back to face them, a steely expression across his features and perhaps a few tears in his eyes. "I'm going down there to get her."

"If you remove her body you lose any chance of bringing her back." The creature moved in front of Quill's path, blocking his departure.

Quill looked down into the ravine where Gamora's body still lay, broken and without life. "What are you saying?"



Strange breathed in sharply. “Of course...”

Quill rounded on him, eyes wide. “Is she -?”

“The soul stone requires a sacrifice to be able to wield it. It has to come at a price that the wielder needs to pay. To lose something they love... But the soul stone, it must collect souls. Her soul is trapped in the stone. We can bring her back.”

Quill choked. “She’s alive?”

“Her body is not. Her soul is,” the robed figure confirmed. “The soul stone only requires the sacrifice of a soul. If the soul is returned to the body...”

“It will revive her,” finished Nebula, who Strange had later learned was her name. She had mostly been quiet throughout the trip. “But with serious injuries.”

“Yes. You will have limited time to save her life. Time will be given to allow you to do so,” the Watcher finished.

“I have to leave her here?” whispered Quill.

“If you want her back, yes. Bring the soul stone back here and return it to its resting place and the one sacrificed shall be released. Take her body away and the exchange will not work and her soul will remain trapped forever.”

“I can’t take her body and bring it back?” asked Quill.

The figure shook his head. “No. It nullifies the exchange if her physical body leaves this place.”

“Gamora wouldn’t want you crying over this. She’d do it.” Drax stated the obvious. He had been silent thus far.

“I’m not crying!”

“There are tears there,” stated Nebula. “They’re not hard to miss.”

“You’re not seeing anything,” responded Quill, denying the obvious.

“At least you can get her back,” reaffirmed Strange. “We just need to get the Soul Stone from Thanos.”

And that would be no easy feat.

## **SANCTUARY II**

Tony woke.

Full awareness came to him quickly as the alien environment he was in flooded into him, waking him quickly, as fear swallowed him whole. He was resting against the wall, limbs

free but on his wrists were a set of gold cuffs. There was no chain between them.

His neck felt heavy and he reached up to find a collar fitted around it. What was this? Was he some sort of pet?

His wounds were all healed though the skin still felt tender around the stab area. He could still feel the sword embedded within him, the Titan pushing it in further until the hilt rested against his stomach. He wasn't sure he would ever forget that moment. It would haunt him forever.

The room he was in was poorly lit and bare. He was in a cell. He'd been placed sitting up against the wall. Moving his right hand, Tony traced the area of the wound, feeling the skin beneath his undershirt. It was smooth and there was no evidence of any injury.

Swallowing the bile in his throat, Tony struggled to his feet. He wasn't just going to sit here and wait for the inevitable. He'd been pretty much out of it when Thanos had presented him to the Avengers. He had done that, right? Tony hadn't hallucinated it, had he?

"You did not."

*Shit.*

Tony had hoped it had been. Had any of his former team-mates really cared? He remembered talking to his captor after being brought back here but it was hazy in his mind. He'd been going into shock and his wound had hurt like hell. Now he was more aware and far more frightened than he wanted to be.

Thanos was before him.

He hadn't heard the door open.

Tony flinched as Thanos reached forward.

"Come with me."

Tony crinkled his nose up in disgust. "No." He would never do what this mad-man wanted. He'd have to be forced.

"You have no choice," decreed Thanos, his voice harsher.

"Make me," growled Tony. Defiance may kill him but it would be better than acquiescing to his demands.

Thanos grabbed Tony by the shirt and dragged him forward. "I have something to show you."

"I'm not interested!" Tony tried to pull away from the grip.

"You cannot fight me." He released Tony's shirt.

“Try me!” snarled Tony. Well aware of the cuffs around his wrists, Tony tried to lash out with a left hook but a yellow thread suddenly appeared between the cuffs on his wrists and the one on his neck. Tony’s arms were wrenched up high and his whole body lifted up off the floor. Wincing, he fought against the pressure on his wrists and his throat.

Thanos turned to leave the cell and Tony floated after him.

The Titan led Tony through the ship. The cuff around his throat prevented him from looking around and truly memorising the way. Thanos was giving him no chances to escape.

They came to what appeared to be a command centre. Tony didn’t see a view-screen. Instead there were lots of smaller screens situated around a console situated in the centre of the room. If the ship they were on was moving Tony supposed Thanos would be well aware if they were going to hit something mid-flight.

He was deposited on the floor, He refused to stand. He wasn’t ordered to either.

Something flickered in the corner of his eye and Tony looked at a hologram that had appeared above the central console. He gasped.

It was an image of himself in the Mark VII armour carrying the nuclear warhead through the portal.

“This is you several years ago.” Thanos stated this confidently.

It didn’t need answering; it was fairly obvious it was.

“You have perfected your armour.”

Now this he could answer.

“Not enough to beat you!” retorted Tony.

“Nothing can beat me, Stark,” replied Thanos darkly. “You’ve given me all you have.” The Titan reached over to Tony and stroked his hair.

Attempting to pull away did him no favours as the fingers latched onto his hair and held him firmly in place.

“I respect you. Not many have earned my respect. I wanted to bestow upon you the gift of death. You are the only one to face me in years who deserves it. Anyone else... they are not worth my time in personally killing, but you... You are worth my time,” explained Thanos. “I only withhold the gift of death for now. Rest assured, Stark, I will kill you.”

The hand extracted itself from his hair and Tony took the opportunity to shuffle back, his heart pumping fast in his chest as he tried to distance himself from the Mad Titan.

Thanos was continuing as he slowly walked around the console. “I have searched for years for a worthy opponent to challenge me. It is good to have one worthy of my attention at last.

It will be a shame to kill you. You should be honoured I seek to bequeath this honour upon you.”

Tony glared at his captor, trying to ignore the fear in his head or his stomach. “If you give me the chance to fight, I will kill you!”

Thanos laughed. The sound was unnerving and terrifying. “Oh, you will not have another chance.”

“You’re terrified I will beat you. You lack opponents worthy of your attention, why kill the one who does? If you’re so confident, you will win again!” Baiting Thanos wasn’t the most sensible option. Tony didn’t care.

The stones in the Gauntlet activated and Tony was lifted into the air again and floated over to Thanos.

“I’ve bested you in combat.” The Titan grabbed Tony by the front of his clothes. “There is no second chance.”

Tony just smiled though he was sure it didn’t reach his eyes. He was terrified, felt like he was quaking in his shoes, yet he remained defiant.

The Titan released him yet he continued to hover in the air, still forced to be as close to the Titan as possible by the mere power of the Infinity Stones.

“We have other topics to discuss.”

“Do we? I’d rather not.”

“You have no choice in the matter, Stark. I told your friends you would suffer until they give me the final stone. I am not against torturing you but only if you force my hand.”

Tony watched him carefully. He could continue to be defiant and end up being tortured or he could help himself out by learning as much as possible about Thanos. If he could discover a weakness...

“Well, Stark?” Thanos was getting impatient by his lack of response.

Tony gritted his teeth, wondering if he was about to set himself upon the right path or the wrong path. “Fine. We’ll talk.”

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

I subscribe to the idea that Tony is integral to Thanos' defeat which is why Strange saved his life on Titan by trading the Time Stone rather than that the snap had to happen at a

specific point. No matter, in all the futures, Strange saw, Thanos achieved his goal of halving the universe. What I think matters is who survives past the snap. I believe Tony will play a vital role, perhaps the most important role, in defeating Thanos in Avengers 4. We will see next year but this story will follow this idea.

Next chapter should be posted next week.

# The Discussion

## Chapter Summary

Thanos and Tony talk and Steve and Bruce catch-up.

## Chapter Notes

My apologies for the delay. I didn't expect to take so long in updating. This chapter was particularly hard to write. I'm also still trying to figure out where this is going but I have a few ideas :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## SANCTUARY II

Thanos smiled at Tony's response to his offer of discussion rather than torture.

A shudder of fear ran up Tony's spine. Seeing the Titan smile wasn't something Tony wanted to see often. It was terrifying.

It was surprising however that the cuff around his neck and wrists sprung open.

"We can only discuss things in a civilised setting," explained Thanos.

"Right..." Tony was unsure but rubbed his wrists wearily.

"Be warned if you defy me they will go straight back on," warned the Titan.

Tony didn't bother to answer. He knew the score. Knew the consequences.

Waving the Gauntlet hand, Thanos created a chair. It didn't look comfortable to sit on as it was cushioned with anything. "Sit."

"I suppose if I don't, you'll force me?" Tony responded. He'd rather stand.

Thanos responded by using the Infinity Stones to drag Tony to the chair and force him to sit. "Are you going to make me restrain you?"

Tony shrugged. "You clearly don't want to." His hands were wrenched behind his back, hard, nearly pulling his shoulders out of his pockets. "Ow!"

“Your continued defiance will cause you pain. You agreed to talk otherwise I will have you tortured and your friends on Earth will witness it. I will make sure of that, Stark.”

Tony gritted his teeth, glaring at his captor. He couldn’t help resisting. “What do you want to know?”

Thanos strode forward until he towered over him. The way he looked down upon his prisoner gave Tony the eerie feeling this was an interrogation as opposed to a talk. “Your wizard was very hasty in giving me the Time Stone in return for your life. Why?”

Tony baulked. “How am I supposed to know?”

“Do you expect me to believe you don’t know?”

“You better because I know nothing,” stated Tony, keeping his eyes focused upon the Titan. He was telling the truth. Strange should have let him die and kept the Time Stone from Thanos.

“I only met him today!” shouted Tony. “You just had to attack didn’t you? My day was going fine until you decided you wanted to dest-” His throat tightened and his airways cut off. Choking, Tony scrabbled for his neck, trying to find air that he simply could not breathe.

“I am saving the universe,” said Thanos darkly.

Air came back into Tony’s throat and he gulped it down greedily. “Could you just not... you know... strangle me?”

“Co-operate then,” suggested Thanos. It was a reasonable request.

But one Tony preferred not to follow.

“I only met Strange today,” clarified Tony. There was no harm in revealing that piece of information. “He found me!”

“I wonder if he had an ulterior motive to ask for your life in return for the stone? A man simply does not trade an Infinity Stone to save someone he just barely met,” mused Thanos. “I wondered why he never used his greatest weapon. The stone would have made him more powerful when fighting me. He declined to use the power he had access to.” He paused, only to speak up again: “He used the stone to see the future before I arrived on Titan, didn’t he?”

Tony swallowed. He wasn’t going to answer that. Nope. Not at all. He remembered the words of Strange and that there had been one future in which they won... *Don’t think of it!*

“Don’t try to hide things from me, Stark,” warned the Titan, lifting the Gauntlet up to Tony’s face. “I can easily take what I want from your mind without even trying. You can either tell me or suffer.”

Tony stiffened. No way in hell would he ever willingly tell the Titan anything to do with what Strange had said. If Strange had given up the Time Stone because Tony was important... “Even if I told you, you would still read my mind to make sure I wasn’t lying.”

Thanos smirked. "Correct. You are learning."

"No point in saving myself the pain really, is there, if you are just going to mind rape me anyway?" decided Tony.

"A shame you have to see it that way," stated Thanos, uncaring.

"A pity you cannot trust what I have to say," retorted Tony, glaring at his captor. He was not looking forward to this. Not one bit.

The Gauntlet came to rest upon Tony's head.

Tony held his breath.

"Last chance, Stark."

"No," he said through gritted teeth.

And then the grip tightened and intense pain spread through his head. He felt like he was on fire. He couldn't jerk his head away no matter how much he wanted to. A scream wrenched forth from his throat. It felt like fingers were invading his brain, slowly pulling it apart.

Images flashed in front of his eyes. Pepper. Siberia. Titan. Strange. His brain focused on Strange and all his interactions with him.

Thanos perused the memories slowly, taking great pleasure tearing into the next memory, until finally he stopped, replaying the same memory over and over.

The one where Strange looked into the future and saw over 14 million futures in which Thanos won and only one where the Avengers succeeded in stopping him.

Thanos replayed the memory several times before he released Tony's head. "He never told you what he saw?"

Sagging in the chair, Tony felt dizzy, and took in deep breaths to keep himself conscious. Much as he wanted the blissfulness of darkness, he knew right now wouldn't be the right time to do so. "No..." he responded.

"And yet he still bargained for your life..." Thanos cocked his head to the side and then reached out with his non-gauntlet hand to take Tony's chin in his hand. He lifted the head up, gripping the sides hard. "What did he see that makes your life worth trading the Time Stone for? I saw the memory when he said he would not trade it for anything and would allow you and the boy to die. And yet he didn't follow through..."

"I... don't... know...." gasped Tony.

The grip tightened. "Clearly you are important in this one future in which your Avengers won. He sought to put us on that path by having your life spared." The hand moved from his chin to his throat.



Tony choked as the Gauntlet-hand rested on the top of his skull.

“Rest assured Stark, I will break your neck as soon as I have what I want. You will not live to defeat me.”

Releasing him, Thanos stepped back. “It’s a shame you have to die in the end. I was hoping we could be allies.”

Tony snorted as best he could. “I will never work with you. You’ve haunted me for six years ever since New York! If it’s the last thing I do, I will kill you!”

Thanos chuckled. “No, you won’t.”

Tony didn’t respond. If he survived this, he would do anything he could to end this Titan.

“The circular scar on your chest, what is it?”

Tony started. He hadn’t been expecting that.

“I saw it when you were being healed of your injuries.”

He supposed there wasn’t much harm in revealing that nugget of information to his captor. He no longer had it. He had agreed to talk to Thanos after all.

“I was injured, had a device in my chest of my own making to keep myself alive until technology had advanced far enough for it to be removed.” Tony didn’t need to go into detail.

“It is a scar you wear proudly,” noted Thanos, calmly.

Not really. He’d come to terms with it.

“Take off the shirt.”

“What?” He was shocked by that request. “Erm, no fucking way!”

Thanos merely looked at him before sighing and using the Gauntlet on him.

Tony’s shirt vanished.

“HEY! Give that back!” Tony scrambled off the chair, trying to get as far away from the Titan as possible. His movement was halted as Thanos twisted the Gauntlet and made Tony float back towards him, his body frozen in time, though he still had the ability to talk, blink and move his head. “Don’t you dare!”

Ignoring his captive’s protests, Thanos reached out and pressed his fingers to the scars upon Tony’s chest, tracing the scars that resembled where the Arc Reactor had once sat.

Shivering, Tony couldn’t jerk away, only wait for Thanos to finish his inspection. He did not like to be touched.

“Your device...” mused Thanos, “could repel Infinity Stones. Why? It succeeded in doing so when the Trickster attempted to control you shortly before my army invaded.”

Eyes widening, Tony scoffed: “I don’t know why it did.” He had a theory but not one he was willing to share with Thanos.

“I know Earth history, Stark,” continued Thanos, moving away from his prisoner, waving the Gauntlet which then replaced Tony’s shirt. “A lot of the information the God of Lies accessed I saw. I know the Tesseract was found by a man named Howard Stark. You are his son.”

Tony kept silent. He wasn’t going to give anything away.

Thanos chuckled. “It stands to reason your father studied it. Earth technology has only advanced recently. Your device... The element you created harnesses the same energy as the Tesseract. It can defend you against the powers of the stones. It is this technology you would have used to defeat me. I cannot allow this.”

Damn, that had been his theory. Tony had realised his father had experimented with the Tesseract and his arc reactor had been based off on what he had learned. Howard had never been able to fully harness it but Tony had. But Tony didn’t believe he was the key to Thanos’ defeat. Not when there were people like Thor around who had powers even Tony didn’t understand.

How could a mere human be capable of defeating a great Titan like Thanos when there were gods around?

“I cannot kill you yet, Stark. For now you get to live. But when I have what I want, then your life will be forfeit.”

Tony glared. “We’ll see about that.”

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## **WAKANDA**

Pepper walked out of the QuinJet. Her hair was a mess and her eyes tear-stained. Her clothes baggy and she walked with support from Rhodey.

Awaiting their return was Steve, Natasha and Bruce.

“Miss Potts,” said Steve, quietly.

“Rogers,” she said. “You didn’t even try to save him.”

Steve swallowed. He didn’t know how to respond. Pepper clearly knew that they’d allowed Thanos to depart with Tony. He hadn’t wanted to.

“Pep...” Rhodey began quietly, “it was Tony’s choice too. I was there. We couldn’t really do anything more than we did.”

Pepper swallowed. “He cared for you, Rogers. He thought you valued your friendship but you betrayed him in the worst possible way. And your letter of apology? I saw it too. It wasn’t much of one. I’ll work with you but do not expect me to like you.” She pulled herself away from Rhodey and started to walk towards the entrance to the Wakandan city.

Rhodey grimaced. “You’ve got a lot to work on, Steve. Pepper will come around. I’ll see you later... She’s still upset and... well... it’s evident isn’t it?” He followed Pepper into the city.

Steve let out a deep breath he was holding. He hadn’t expected it to be this awkward.

Bruce turned to look at them. “What did you do to Tony, Steve? Tony said you’d had a falling out but Thanos was a much greater threat that we needed to be together for... It wasn’t a simple disagreement, was it?”

Steve traded a glance with Natasha.

“First it was about the Accords. I didn’t want to be dictated to by who I could save by people in the government. It wasn’t right that they could just pick and choose who should live and die,” explained Steve.

“Wait... what?” Bruce looked at Steve incredulously. “Did you even read the Accords?”

Steve pulled a face. “Some of it...”

“Wow. Whilst I was waiting for you to locate Vision and Wanda, I was at the compound with Rhodey, getting caught up on the Accords and then reading the ratified version that is in place. It’s nothing like you believe it to be.”

“But...”

Bruce cut him off. “I know I haven’t been on-world for years, Steve, but even I know siding against the government is the wrong thing to do, especially when the public is clamouring for regulation for the Avengers! Tony has the political influence to swing things our way! Did you think we would have to face a panel before going off to save anyone?”

Steve nodded. “That’s what it said.”

Bruce groaned. “Boy... you are so wrong. We are citizens of America. The Accords gave us the right to go and solve problems in America without regulation, without asking before going. Tony’s been solving things on his own for the past few years because they’ve been happening in America! It’s when events happen in other countries we have to get permission first – and that is just to cross their borders! We’d be on the way there whilst communicating with the committee. If something happened, in which a large amount of life was lost, we would have to face a panel to review our actions but that is normal, Steve. If the country gave us permission to be there... we’d be safe from prosecution.”

“We couldn’t trust anything Ross said,” said Steve.

“He’s not in charge of the Accords.”

“Yes he is.”

Bruce laughed. “He’s on the committee, yes, but he’s not in charge. I don’t like him and he doesn’t even know I’m back yet. But even I would have sided with Tony on this. The Avengers broke up because you couldn’t trust Tony?”

“That was some of it...” admitted Natasha. “The Accords were going to happen regardless. We would have had more influence if we’d all signed. But for Tony to forgive Steve... There’s more...”

“Bucky got involved in the Accords. It was complicated,” said Steve quietly. “Tony discovered Bucky was innocent in what Ross was accusing him of and came to help us... Unfortunately everything went wrong...”

“What happened?” urged Bruce. “Steve, I need to know!”

Steve sighed. “Tony found out Bucky killed his parents.”

Bruce’s face paled. “What?”

“And I knew and kept it from him,” admitted Steve.

“You. Did. What? Oh. Man, Steve, no wonder Tony was hesitant about contacting you!” Bruce shook his head. “He was about to when the alien ship arrived in New York...” He was still shaking his head. “Steve... how long did you know?”

“Two years...”

“Why did you keep it from him?” asked Bruce.

“Because it wasn’t Bucky. He was brainwashed, ordered to do so by Hydra.”

“And that’s a reason to keep it from your team-mate?” Bruce sighed. “You were afraid of Tony’s reaction, weren’t you?”

“He tried to kill Bucky after finding out! I had to fight him!” Steve retorted, feeling angry.

“Ok, let me get this straight, Tony found out and tried to kill Bucky? That’s understandable, Steve. It’s a natural reaction. Tony could have killed Bucky straight away if he really wanted to. His suit has that ability. He just hit him, didn’t he?”

Steve swallowed and nodded.

“Steve, Tony may have wanted to kill Bucky, but I don’t think he would’ve. You kept him from the truth of how his parents died. It doesn’t matter if Hydra was responsible for making Bucky do it as the Winter Soldier. Tony needed to fight it out to get it out of his system. Tony’s reaction was natural to someone learning something traumatic and realising their killer is in the same room as him. Fighting him was the worst mistake you could have made...”

“What was I supposed to do? Let him kill Bucky?” shouted Steve.

Bruce stepped back. “No. You hold them. Stop them from doing something stupid. Talk it out.”

“Tony was in his suit, Bruce, how was I supposed to contain that?” scoffed Steve.

“You’re a super-soldier, Steve. You are more than capable.”

Steve was about to bite back but Natasha laid a hand on his arm.

“Steve, Bruce. What happened in Siberia cannot be changed. We all have regrets over the Accords. We should have handled them differently. But right now, we have bigger problems than to argue over this,” intervened Natasha. “Tony is in danger. We’re not going to leave him to Thanos. We’ve got to figure out a way to stop Thanos for good. Even if we rescue Tony, he won’t stop coming. We need to assemble everyone and work as a team if we even stand a chance of winning.”

Bruce crossed his arms over his chest. “Fine. I can work with you. But once this is over, you and Tony need to have a serious talk.”

“I know.” Steve knew exactly what he needed to say.

The trouble was, was coming up with the right words to say it.

But right now, they had bigger problems to solve than to worry about a conversation that may or may not happen.

Saving Tony was their priority.

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## **SANCTUARY II**

Stark was back in his cell.

Thanos stood in the command centre of his ship, considering his next course of action. He was keeping an eye upon the android on Earth who held the last stone. He could see they were trying to remove it from him without ending its life. Why they were concerned about an android was beyond him.

He was trying to save the universe, to make it better for people to live without the burdens of a failing society.

His mind kept looping back to his captive however.

Stark was enigma. He was dangerous, Thanos could sense it. He’d only spared him to ensure he acquired the Time Stone but the Soul Stone had already warned him how dangerous the human could be. This man could defeat him, he was sure of it. The human didn’t know or understand how he could, but the potential was there.

Much as Thanos wanted to keep Stark around, to groom him into his perfect soldier, he knew it wouldn't be possible. Stark was too set in his ways to change his view or want to join Thanos on his glorious quest. Even if he wiped Stark's memory, the danger would still be there.

No, he'd already decided Stark had to die. Out of all the opponents he had to face in his quest so far, Stark was the only one who needed to die. That he was sure of, no matter how much Thanos would have preferred to keep the human alive.

Death was the only way to prevent Stark becoming too powerful to defeat him.

Once Thanos had balanced the universe, he didn't need someone coming along to undo his noble work, did he?

Stark had to die, no matter how much Thanos wanted to educate him in other ways.

It was the only way.

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

Thanos has mixed thoughts about Tony. On one hand he sees him as an equal and someone he wants to turn to his side, on the other, he knows Tony is a danger to him and the only way to ensure his plan succeeds is to kill Tony. Luckily for Tony, he is needed alive at the moment...

I hope to post more soon...

# Thanos Demands

## Chapter Summary

The Avengers make plans and Doctor Strange with Peter Parker and the Guardians arrive on Earth. And Thanos and Tony take a trip.

## Chapter Notes

First, I just want to apologise for the delay in this chapter! I've just been really busy lately and finding time to write is difficult.

Secondly, thank you for all the comments for this story so far! I hope people stick with this. I plan to finish this though I currently have no sort of plan in place and as for how many chapters? No idea. We'll see though. This could be quite long in the end.

I hope everyone enjoys this latest chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## WAKANDA

### THREE DAYS AFTER THANOS' ULTIMATUM

They had assembled in the throne room. T'Challa sat in his chair, with the others scattered at various points around the room. They were all battle weary. Most noticeable of all were the invisible lines that had been drawn, showing the divisions within the Avengers.

Shuri was continuing on working to remove the Mind Stone, whilst Wanda kept a vigil at the table-side. She kept glancing towards Steve.

Pepper and Bruce stood on one side of the room, with Rhodey in the middle, between the rest of the Avengers. Thor mingled more to the centre, unsure of the divisions between the group, though he seemed to lean more towards Bruce than anyone else. Perhaps that was because Bruce and Thor had spent some time together. The God didn't really have any concept of Earth politics and this wasn't the time to debate them.

"Being divided isn't going to help anyone," interjected T'Challa in the ensuing silence.

Steve nodded and moved forward. "We need to work together if we are going to stop this."

“I find it hard to trust you, Rogers,” replied Pepper coldly. “You do not even care. I bet you would if it was your Bucky.”

Steve flinched, ignoring the temptation to share a glance with his best friend.

“Enough!” T’Challa ordered.

“Pepper.” Rhodey moved towards her, reaching out to touch her arms. “I worked with them because it was the only way to safeguard the Earth. Even Bruce said, before the attack on New York, that Tony was about to call Steve. I know what has happened the last few years hasn’t been... great. But it has bought you and Tony closer together.”

Pepper looked down at the engagement ring on her finger, touching it briefly with her other hand. They’d got back together once Pepper had heard word of Tony’s injuries from Siberia. Steve’s betrayal had ultimately brought her back to him. “But I’ve lost him. He went on that ship... I begged him not to!”

“Pep...” Rhodey pulled her into a hug. “Tony had to. It wasn’t just the Earth in danger, it was the whole universe. It still is. We hold the last remaining piece that this Thanos desires. We have an advantage that he does not.”

“He has Tony,” whispered Pepper.

“Miss Potts.” Steve cleared his throat. “We all made mistakes two years ago with the Accords. There were no correct solutions about it. Perhaps Tony was right in signing them. He’s managed to stay fighting the good fight while we run and hide from the law. I should never have kept the truth from him about his parents either. I regret that, I really do. I want to make it up to him. No matter our feelings for Tony, he will still be a part of this team. And we protect our own.” He halted, biting his lower lip. “It’s just Vision is a part of this team too. Giving him up, giving Thanos this stone, he will win. I don’t like the price we may have to pay to stop Thanos... But at the moment we have to work with what we have.”

“If Thanos is allowed to assemble all six stones, he can wipe half the universe out of existence with the snap of his fingers.” Thor cast his gaze around. “We cannot allow that to happen. The very fate of the universe rests in our hands. It is imperative we keep a hold of the last Infinity Stone. Thanos uses people against others to get what he wants. Loki died saving me. He gave up the Tesseract to spare my life.”

There was an uneasy murmur through the room.

“What can we do?” Natasha queried. “A rescue?”

Thor clenched his hands. “Yes. We remove Stark from Thanos and he holds no sway over us.”

“He’ll send his army again,” pointed out Sam. “Do we want to be dealing with that as well as him?”



“Which is why, at the same time as rescuing Stark, we aim to kill Thanos for good.” Thor’s eyes burned. “He is not an adversary we can simply defeat and allow to walk away in chains. He is a menace and must be destroyed.”

Thor had changed, everyone could see it. He wasn’t the same Thor they had come to know during the few years they had been a team. He was harder, less forgiving. Something had clearly changed him.

“If that’s the plan we’re going to go with, how do we even get to Thanos and Tony?” Rhodey mused. “They’re not on Earth, are they? Would they be on board the ships above the Earth?”

Thor shook his head. “No. Thanos has his own warship. Stark will be there. It will be in his own sector of space. Now he has the Space Stone, Thanos can move from one place to another using it. He does not need a ship to travel long distances.”

“You might have missed it, Thor, but Earth is not advanced enough for space-travel,” said Bruce.

An unforgiving smile spread across Thor’s face and he turned towards the Racoon and the adolescent tree that had accompanied him to Wakanda. “Rabbit, do you have a way of contacting your ship?”

## **DEEP SPACE**

### **ENROUTE TO EARTH**

Quill kept to his word.

He’d promised to return them to Earth once he had retrieved Gamora’s body from Vormir. Now that he couldn’t give her the burial she deserved if he wanted to see her alive again, Quill’s demeanour had changed. He was fixed with one goal in mind: kill Thanos and get the stone to bring Gamora back.

Strange watched the human quietly. He was barely talking to his team-mates as he piloted their way towards the Earth, choosing to remain secluded from the rest of them. He kept mulling over what he had seen in the future. Had they lost their chance now to win? Were they doomed to fail? He didn’t like Stark, or rather he hadn’t liked him. He had found respect for the man after witnessing the various futures he had seen.

In each path he had followed, Strange had seen Stark suffer throughout it all. Not one future did he see where they could win if Stark died. No matter what happened on Titan, no matter how it played out, in every future Stark was always stabbed, as if it was a fixed point in time, destined to happen.

He’d followed so many small and insignificant paths following Stark’s death on Titan, that it hadn’t occurred to Strange until the last thread he had seen before coming out of his trance, to follow the line of ‘what if he had surrendered the Time Stone to save Stark?’.

Perhaps he should have looked at different threads, but once he had seen one winning future he had been determined to set them upon that path.

Thanos had gone against what Strange had seen. Now he had no way of knowing if they were still on the winning path or not.

“Mr Strange?” the small voice spoke.

Strange jerked out of his reverie. The spider-boy stood there.

“We’re nearly home.”

Inclining his head, Strange stood and followed the boy further into the cockpit where they found Drax and Mantis sitting in their chairs. “How long?”

“About thirty minutes out. They already know we’re coming,” stated Quill, not moving his gaze from the windows which showed streaking light all around them as they jumped between points.

“The God-man with Rocket and Groot are expecting us,” said Drax simply.

“God-man?” Peter crinkled his face up. “You mean Thor?”

“Yeah, the not-so good looking one,” replied Quill, albeit harshly.

Strange could sense jealousy vibes coming from the man but considering the loss he had suffered, it was only understandable he was taking his loss out on others. It didn’t mean he had to like it however.

The rest of the trip was spent in silence until they dropped out of the jump point, situated behind Mars. From there, Quill engaged thrusters and the ship shot through space, moving fast and gaining distance quickly.

The blue, green and white pearly visual of Earth stood out in the view-screen as they grew closer to the planet.

“Open communications,” stated Quill. “We need to announce our intentions before landing. Terra isn’t space-worthy yet.”

“Then how did you get into space?” asked Peter.

Quill glanced over his shoulder. “Kid, abductions happen. I haven’t been here in over thirty years. A lot has happened since then. I didn’t think I’d ever be back here.”

“We’re getting a message from Rocket,” announced Drax, looking down at his console.

“Transfer it,” ordered Quill.

Strange watched as Quill read the message as it appeared on his terminal. “Can we land?”

“Yes, in a place called Wakanda, apparently.” Quill moved his hands over the console, adjusting the power of the engines and the pressure, stabilising the wings as the ship hit the

atmosphere. He slowed their descent, coming down in a smooth dip, his sensors pinging whenever he needed to alter course.

They burst through a shot of cloud and saw below them the green, green grass of Wakanda.

Peter's eyebrows rose in admiration. "Wow, this place... I'd heard stories... It's not like the other African nations around it."

As they flew lower and lower towards a tree-line, Quill braced the controls.

"Errr... Shouldn't we be going up? We're going to hit those trees!" Peter exclaimed.

Strange just watched as Quill didn't speak.

The trees disintegrated before their eyes and the ship flew into a wide, open space, a long and large lake shimmering below them. Ahead was a city that looked technologically advanced, more so than any other city on Earth.

"A secretive country harbouring technology that shouldn't even exist yet," mused Strange. "Wakanda is just opening its borders for the first time in years. The world doesn't know what it has here yet."

Quill brought the ship down to land, close to the main palace of the city, where, on the landing pad three people waited. Or rather, one person waited along with a Racoon and a tree.

Strange wasn't surprised by the alien lifeforms. At least he recognised Thor, though he'd had a haircut since.

Unstrapping themselves, the six of them descended the ramp and out onto the landing pad. Nebula had spent the trip away from them, choosing to seclude herself away from the main crew.

The Racoon ran up to them. "You're looking a bit beat up, Quill."

There were bruises on Quill's face. "Gamora's dead."

The Racoon stopped. "What? You're lying, aren't you?"

"No."

Thor walked towards Strange. "It's good to see you again."

Strange eyed the god. "We have things we need to discuss, urgently." He couldn't put it off much longer. If he was going to ensure they were on the winning path, the Avengers needed to be updated urgently, before they made any risky plan that could jeopardise the future.

- - - - -

Steve stood and listened as Doctor Stephen Strange spoke about Titan, what had happened on the planet and the ensuing kidnapping of Tony.

“So, we have you to blame for this.” Wanda moved from Vision’s side.

Shuri was still trying to remove the Infinity Stone. It was taking days to complete as the connections were so fragile and interconnected within Vision. They hadn’t expected for it to take so long but Shuri had needed her rest. Her estimation currently was she was nearly 75% complete with the process.

“I could lose someone I love for Stark. Again.” Wanda’s said, spitefully.

Strange’s dark gaze turned on the brunette. “You’ll lose more if we let him die.”

Steve had always tolerated Wanda’s dislike of Tony. She’d had plenty of reasons to do so. She had mellowed over the two years since they’d been exile, especially since Vision had clarified Tony had always known where they were and had not turned them in. Steve was grateful for that.

“You make it sound like Tony is important,” stated Steve quietly.

“There is something I have yet to tell you.” Strange began a slow walk around the room. “When we were on Titan, I used the Time Stone to look into the future. I saw fourteen million, six hundred and five different scenarios. I saw only one scenario in which we won.”

“One?”

Shock reverberated around the room.

Steve’s mind whirled as the complications arose in his head.

“Everything I have done has been to set us upon the winning path. But... it has not worked out how I planned it,” admitted Strange.

“What was supposed to happen after you gave up the stone?” asked Steve.

“Thanos was supposed to eradicate half of all life in the universe, including me and some others here after he acquired the Mind Stone. He was supposed to win. I never saw the details but I saw being resurrected again, and I saw Stark.” Strange moved his eyes over to Tony’s fiancée, who sat off to the side with Rhodey and Bruce. “In every failed future I saw, I let Thanos kill Stark after he stabbed him. And when I looked at a future where I willingly gave up the Time Stone to spare Stark, I saw success. Tony Stark is the key to taking down Thanos. Your future depends on his survival.”

## **SANCTUARY II**

Tony abruptly woke from his sleep. He could feel a pair of eyes watching him. He didn’t want to roll over and see him standing there, looking at him with interest.

Unfortunately, the Titan’s voice echoed out, shattering the illusion. “You’re awake, good.”

A hand threaded into his hair, forcing him to turn his body around until he was looking up at his captor. Attempting to struggle was futile. The Titan was too strong.

“What do you want?” Tony didn’t want an answer but he was going to get one regardless.

“It’s been nearly three days since I took you. Three days since I issued my ultimatum to your friends.”

“They’re not m-” He was cut off by a tightening sensation in his throat. Tony gulped, struggling to breathe.

“They’re your friends, Stark. Do not contradict me.” Thanos warned him.

The throat closing sensation stopped and Tony pulled in gasps of air.

“They are not moving. Not doing anything. Still they try to remove the stone from that creature’s head. Things would be so much simpler if they just gave it to me.”

“Vision isn’t a creature!” hissed Tony. “He’s evolving! He’s learning!”

Thanos laughed. “He was born from the stone. He cannot live without it. Attempting to save his life is fruitless. They’ll be disappointed.”

“No matter what you do to me, they will never trade the stone for me.” Tony glared up at his captor, defiance in his eyes and expression.

“You’re wrong. You are far too important for them to simply let you stay with me.”

Tony doubted that. He really did.

“I think it is time to give them a bit of a push, don’t you?” Thanos reached for Tony’s arm, tightening his grip as his prisoner started to struggle.

“What –” Tony saw a flash of blue before he was dragged through a portal and away from his cell.

## **WAKANDA**

The last thing they expected as they discussed tactics was for a portal to open in the middle of the throne room and for Thanos to step out, dragging Tony by the arm.

Since neither of them had been expecting it, none of them had any weapons, save for Wanda who immediately used her powers to shield Vision and Shuri. Shuri paused in her work for a few brief moments before continuing, a slight expression of fear on her face as she saw the Titan that behind everything that had happened lately.

“Tony!” Pepper shouted out. She was stopped from running forward by Rhodey who grabbed her by the arm, pulling her back.

Tony’s mouth opened but nothing came out. The Titan had silenced him.

“Let him go!” roared Steve, bouncing forward.

Purple flashed on the Gauntlet and Steve stopped, held in place by the power of the Infinity Stone. Everyone else in the room couldn't move either. Only Wanda, Vision and Shuri remained unaffected, protected by Wanda's magic.

"I will not be letting him go. Nor shall he be allowed to speak during our time here." The Titan threw a sideways glance towards his captive. "However, he may scream. We all have things to discuss." Thanos' eyes moved towards Vision.

"You will not touch him!" snarled Wanda, straining as she continued to use her powers to continuously keep them shielded.

"I could destroy your pitiful shield easily," snarled Thanos. "I would prefer to avoid bloodshed. All I want is the stone. Nothing more than that. Is it not a simple request? None of you have to die." The Titan smiled, turning to focus his gaze upon Doctor Strange. "I know you saw the future, wizard. I believed you had never used your greatest weapon against me, but you had."

Tony was dropped to the floor, falling with a crash onto his shoulder, causing him to wince in pain.

"You bargained for me to spare his life. I did. Only to find out later you did view different paths you could take. Stark's head is full of information I can use to my advantage. Do not believe me to be stupid, wizard. I know how important Stark must be for you to spare his life, especially after you told him you would rather let him die than give up the stone. I could end his life in a matter of seconds."

"If you kill him, you'll be renegading on the deal we made," replied Strange. "You strike me as an honourable being, someone who keeps to their bargains. Stark isn't a threat to you if he's your prisoner."

Thanos chuckled. "He's not a threat to me if he's dead either. Do not pretend you hold power here, wizard. The only one who does is the one who holds what I desire." Walking forward to Wanda's barrier, Thanos used the space stone to drag Tony along the floor. He stopped before the barrier. Ignoring the witch in front of him, he addressed Vision. "His fate rests in your hands. I could easily break through this shield and take what I want. The universe needs balancing."

Vision sat up on the table, his eyes moving from Thanos to Tony to his team-mates. He cocked his head to the side. "If the universe needs balancing, why do you not just provide more resources instead of killing half?"

"Resources are not infinite," replied Thanos coldly.

"You could make them infinite," responded Vision.

"It is not the natural progression of the universe," continued Thanos.

"And killing half of all life is?" Steve spoke up, anger pouring forth from his voice as he tried to struggle against the invisible grip Thanos had on him.

“Death is a natural part of life. It is better to accept the inevitability of death rather than fight against his. However, halving all life prevents the wastage of resources. Those that live will have a better quality of life, able to do what they like instead of struggling every single day to feed every mouth. I will save the universe and the people.” Thanos decreed, casting his gaze around. “You will not stop me. I could end this now.” He reached down and grasped Tony by the head, lifting him up with his non-Gauntlet hand.

Tony gasped silently, wincing.

“I could crack his skull in an instant. One. Little. Squeeze. That is all it would take to end his life.”

As if in demonstration, Thanos pushed on Tony’s skull, squeezing his head, hard enough to hurt but not to kill.

Tony’ mouth opened in a silent scream.

“I promised to spare his life at the time of acquiring the Time Stone. You never said I couldn’t kill him later, Wizard,” threw Thanos back at Doctor Strange.

Suddenly, Tony was dropped to the floor. His hands moved up to shield his skull, attempting to protect himself from further pain.

“If he is truly your saviour, then you will give me the Mind Stone.” Thanos kicked Tony in the ribs, rolling him onto his back. “As I said before: otherwise he will suffer. And I will make sure you know it.”

Clenching his gauntlet hand in a fist, the power stone alight, he pointed his fist at Tony.

And then Tony’s screams echoed out into the room, echoing around the walls, as his body arched erratically. His limbs flayed out in every direction, and he was buckling forwards, trying to curl himself up but unable to. The back of his head smashed against the floor. Blood appeared from Tony’s nose and mouth, trickling down his face.

“STOP IT!”

Thanos released Tony and he slumped, completely still to the floor. He turned his gaze upon Pepper. Her face was white and tears fell down her cheeks.

“For now, I will.” Thanos turned his dark eyes upon Vision once more. “You have one day to make your choice or I will begin taking Stark apart, piece by piece.”

And then Thanos vanished, taking Tony with him, leaving the Avengers and the Guardian’s, to stare at one another in horror.

**To be continued...**

Yeah, Thanos has given Vision a time limit now... Poor Tony. Can they save him in time?

If it wasn't clear, when Thanos froze everyone when he arrived in the throne room, he silenced most of the Avengers and Guardians who were there. He only allowed a few still to speak.

The next chapter should be posted soon... Hopefully in the next few weeks!



# Defiance

## Chapter Summary

The Team defies Thanos and Tony suffers the consequences...

## Chapter Notes

So, I know its been 4 months since I updated... All I can say is that I've been busy with work and personal stuff. I am hoping to update again later this month and keep updates regular from now on.

And, heed the tags... This fic, unexpectedly got a bit dark...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## WAKANDA

“You have to save him!” Pepper finally managed to pull away from Rhodey’s grip on her arm.

“We’re trying!” protested Steve.

“Not hard enough!” she growled. “If you are just going to stand here and do nothing, I’ll do it myself!” There were tears on her cheeks as she struggled to stop herself crying. “I may have disagreed with Tony and the Iron Man suits but I know he does it to protect us, to protect our future. It’s time I stepped up in his absence. I am not letting the man I love be torn to pieces by a genocidal maniac all for a piece of jewellery!”

“It’s not a piece of –” Steve started but then paused when he saw Pepper’s fiery expression focused upon him. She looked angry. Very angry. “Look, Pepper, we have to think of all the factors here. Tony’s life isn’t more important than Vision’s or-”

Pepper spoke over him, anger evident in her voice. “No, it’s never Tony who is important is it, Rogers?” she spat. “If it isn’t your precious Barnes, it’s Maximoff or any other Avenger who isn’t Tony!”

Steve opened his mouth to respond but it was Natasha who replied in his stead.

“I think what Steve means to say is that Tony is just as important as anyone else. The problem we have, Pepper, is Thanos wants what Vision has, which has the power to destroy all of us. How can we choose between the fate of the universe and one man?” Her face was

steel but her eyes showed the emotion behind them. “I don’t like it either. Tony wanted Steve to refuse out on the field. Tony knows the stakes. He knew the risks.”

Pepper breathed out slowly, attempting to calm herself. “Then what do you suggest?”

“We’re trying to remove the stone from Vision’s head. Shuri is a miracle worker,” explained Steve. “She can save Vision’s life so he doesn’t have to die. Once we have the stone out of his head, we can take it somewhere, away from here, away from Thanos. I don’t know where but it will be a lot easier for us if we can save Tony without the stone still being a part of Vision’s make-up.”

Rhodey reached forward and gently touched Pepper’s shoulders. “Pepper, you know I wouldn’t consent to this if we had any other choice. I was there when Thanos arrived in Wakanda. I saw Tony. He didn’t want his life to be spared for an Infinity Stone.” Rhodey glanced at Doctor Strange. “But that’s what you did, on that planet where you ended up. You gave the Time Stone to Thanos for Tony’s life.”

“You do not understand how important it is that he survives. If I tell you more I will ruin any chance I have of this future happening. We may have to lose to ensure Stark wins. We may have to let him collect all the stones. No one here has to like it but if it’s the only path...” Strange trailed off. “If I tell you every detail I put at risk the very fabric of this reality we live in. The present we breathe could be ripped apart by any of you having any foreknowledge of how Stark defeats Thanos.”

“If he’s meant to win, then why not let him? If this is the path to victory then let us just give him the Stone once it is out of Vision’s head,” suggested Sam. “Why deny the inevitable? If Tony Stark is meant to save us, then having him ruined beyond the possibility of him ever being able to fight is not going to work in our favour, is it? Our only option is to save him.”

“At the expense of the rest of the universe?” Steve questioned. “Even if we did this, there is no guarantee it would work in our favour. If we willingly give Thanos the last stone, how do we know he will release Tony? We could be making an even bigger mistake.”

“Allowing Stark to remain with Thanos is not an option,” stated Strange. “I know that for sure.”

“Did you see everything when you looked into the future?” asked Quill, who had been watching the conversation from the side-lines. “Every possible future?”

“I didn’t see every future, no. I stopped once I saw the first winning alternative,” verified Strange. “There are an infinite number of possibilities.”

“But you said we only won one,” countered Mantis. She was standing beside Quill, her head tilted slightly to the side.

“I did. I only saw one possible future where we won out of those fourteen million plus paths I followed. Stark checking up on me dragged me out and back into my body. I had only just begun exploring the possibility of Stark surviving Titan. All the other scenarios before it I elected for him to die at Thanos’ hands. I feel sure if I had stayed within the possible futures I

would have seen more winning paths that involve Stark. He is the key, even if some of you do not like the idea. Without him, the universe has no future, which is why it is imperative his rescue is put above all others.” Strange’s voice was stern but convincing.

“I fail to see how Stark could be our saviour...” muttered Wanda from behind them. “He’s a destroyer! Not a saviour!”

Pepper’s face went purple. “How dare you!” She strode forward but Rhodey grabbed for her.

“Pepper, no!”

“Wanda!” Steve shouted at her. “Despite your issues with him, Tony is still a member of this team and is our friend. What happened two years ago wasn’t his fault. We all chose our own sides. Tony has made mistakes, mistakes he has atoned for. Just like you have atoned for mistakes you have made.”

“Atoned for her mistakes?” shouted Pepper. “When has she ever apologised to Tony for what she did to him? Do you even know what she did? Do you know she was the reason Tony reactivated the Ultron project?” She was seething, angry that Wanda had played the others.

“Tony wasn’t affected by Wanda,” defended Steve.

Pepper scoffed. “Really? Tony told me what she did. Strucker’s base on Sokovia? Her and her brother were there, remember? She showed him his worst fear which was all of you dying.” Pepper looked at Bruce, Nat, Clint, Thor and Steve as she spoke. She could see none of them had known this. “Tony always knew there was something coming after going through the portal in New York. Ultron was designed to protect the planet so he didn’t have to. But she got into his head! He’d already deemed Ultron a project he had to abandon but he reactivated with Bruce because of what he saw. Wanda influenced Tony.”

Steve paused in Wanda’s defence.

“None of us went onto build a murder-bot though,” Natasha said.

Pepper’s eyes narrowed. “And Tony has suffered from PTSD! It shouldn’t surprise you he would act erratically when suffering from that! Wanda’s manipulations made him relapse! He’d made good progress and it was what happened in Sokovia which made me walk away from him. I came back but what Wanda did was the sole reason Tony reactivated the Ultron project. Ever wonder why Tony walked away from the Avengers? It was because she was allowed to join the team without any background or medical checks at all to see if she was suitable! And Tony wasn’t even consulted about it! Tony was never your friend, Rogers, otherwise you would have treated him differently. You read the files SHIELD gave you and never bothered to get to know the real him. Why do you think he is such a closed book? He trusts only three people in the world.” She caught sight of Wanda. “What you did to Tony was unforgiveable. But you have never apologised to him. He was never responsible for your parent’s death. He has given you a second chance, helped you, and tried to protect you when Lagos happened but you all threw it back in his face.” She stepped back, finally done with her words. “None of you will ever be able to understand what Tony has done for the Avengers. If you bothered to get to know him, you might understand.”

Wanda didn't say a word, only looked guilty, almost ashamed.

Rhodey shuffled on his feet. "Are we done arguing? Because we've got a friend to save."

"If he really is their friend," muttered Pepper under her breath.

Rhodey ignored her but her fire was up and Pepper was itching for a fight. "Thanos will come back in twenty-four hours. We have to have a plan in place, otherwise..." he trailed off, not wanting to speak about what might happen to Tony if they were not able to act.

"We'll make a plan," assured Steve. "All of us. Together." He cast his eyes at Pepper. "Even Pepper."

She didn't feel grateful at his attempt to include her.

"We need to stop the fighting between us and start trusting one another," continued Steve. "We've got a teammate to save."

## **SANCTUARY II**

"They won't do it!" gasped Tony as he landed awkwardly on his knees as Thanos teleported them back to his ship. "They'll get the Stone out of Vision's head and hide it from you or something!"

"The outcome will still be the same for you," decreed Thanos. "I mean what I say: I will take you apart, Stark."

Tony didn't like the sound of that.

"You saw Nebula on Titan, I assume?" asked Thanos casually.

Tony felt unnerved by the gentle tone in his captor's voice. He tried not to shake in fear. "Robotic lady who flew a pod in to you?"

"Her, yes. One of my children. A failure. Still a failure each time I tried to improve her."

Tony felt sick. "You... you... did that to her?"

"How else was I supposed to improve her, Stark? Love? Caring?" Thanos laughed.

"Kindness never works. I needed children who would fight for me, see my cause and rally to it. Nebula failed in every possible way. You, Stark, shall become like her, if your friends fail to give me the Stone."

Swallowing, Tony attempted not to feel worried by the prospect of having his limbs replaced or his organs ripped from his body.

"Do you want to know what I will take from you last?" Thanos stepped towards him. "What I shall replace last?"

"You're gonna tell me anyway, regardless of my answer."

A curve of Thanos' lips. "Your heart and your brain. You will become fully machine, bent to my will. When I take your brain, you will be programmed to serve me. And your heart will be given to your friends, so they can see what their choices have done to you."

Oh, Tony did not like the sound of that.

"Through every procedure you shall be awake for it. You will not be allowed to sleep."

"Do you do this to all your enemies or just me?" quipped Tony, trying to find amusement in a situation that scared him to his boots.

Thanos smirked. "Just you." He reached out and caressed Tony's hair. "I don't want to kill you. You are far too intelligent for me to do so, but I can remake you into a loyal servant by taking your humanity away."

"I will not be alive," stated Tony. If he had no heart, no brain and was just machine...

"A form of it, yes. You will still have all your memories..." Thanos moved his hand from Tony's head. "You should never have destroyed my army, Stark. You bought this on yourself."

## **WAKANDA**

A day later Steve and the other Avengers and the Guardians reconvened in the Wakanda Throne Room. Shuri had been successful in removing the Infinity Stone without any undue harm happening to Vision. The android was sitting up on the table he had lain upon for over a day, with Wanda by his side. The hole in his head looked odd but Shuri had managed to reconnect all the synapses and safely remove the Stone, which had gone straight into Doctor Strange's keeping.

The Wizard had used his magic to hide the Stone in a place the Avengers knew not.

Steve checked his watch. Thanos would be arriving soon with Tony to see if the trade would happen.

They had considered attempting to create a fake but the properties were so advanced that even Shuri could not understand the mechanisms of the Infinity Stones. Nor would she be able to replicate it.

They had a plan in place to rescue Tony when Thanos next came to Wakanda. Still, rescuing Tony would cause Thanos to attack Earth again but they could handle it.

"The twenty-four hours are nearly up," said Steve out loud, as he glanced around the room, and then raised his eyes to see that everyone was in place. All they had to do was get the Gauntlet from Thanos. Strange had told them of the plan they had used on Titan to subdue Thanos, which had nearly been successful until the human named Quill had lost it. They were trying to replicate that plan but with a few changes which would ensure they could grab the Gauntlet from the Titan.

Taking control of the Gauntlet would allow Tony the free-will he needed to escape Thanos' clutches.

Pepper had been adamant to be involved. As a non-combatant, he had been surprised to see the suit she had brought with her to Wakanda. Tony had designed her one, in the event of a world catastrophe. Friday, Tony's A.I had informed Pepper of the suit once Tony had been deemed to be missing in space. Instead of shunning the suit, Pepper had accepted it.

They'd only learned of the suit's existence when Pepper walked into the throne room wearing it.

There was a shift in the air.

Steve paused, his eyes moving across the room. He readied himself, raising his Wakandan shields.

A blue, shadowy portal appeared in the centre of the room and Thanos stepped out.

Alone.

This hadn't been in the plan.

"Well, shit," came Quill's response to the obvious indications that Tony would not be rescued right now.

"Did you believe I didn't know you might attempt to rescue Stark next time I came? I left him in his prison." Thanos swept his gaze around the room. "He was not needed. The Stone, where is it?"

Steve swallowed the lump in his throat. "It's gone. Far from here. We sent it away." He was probably dooming Tony but they couldn't let the Titan win.

"I am not a fool." Thanos caught his eyes. "Perhaps Stark was right that you simply do not care for him. Pity."

Getting into a stance, Steve was about to attack when the blue portal appeared behind Thanos again and he stepped back into it, disappearing from sight.

"Why didn't you give the signal?" demanded Pepper, flying straight to Steve. She and Rhodey had been positioned atop a balcony overlooking the throne room. She had flown down straight away.

"Tony wasn't there. Our plan wouldn't have worked. We may have been able to get the Gauntlet from him but how would we rescue Tony?" asked Steve. He thought he had a reasonable explanation.

Pepper faltered. "What do you think he will do to Tony?" she asked him quietly.

Steve didn't want to think or even consider the implications of what would happen to Tony. "I don't know."

## SANCTUARY II

When Thanos returned to the ship with a thunderous look on his face, Tony knew he was in trouble.

Instead of using the Infinity Stones to drag Tony to another room on the ship, Thanos dragged him by the leg, not taking any care if he obtained any injuries in the process.

He was then thrown into the waiting hands of a group of Chitauri warriors. It was when they were manoeuvring him towards a table that Tony became truly afraid. He could see various tools and knives and swords sitting off to the side. There were chains on the table.

He grappled with them but his lack of strength from food or water made it ridiculously easy for the Chitauri to manhandle him onto the table and chain him down. Instead of chaining his right arm down to his sides, they manipulated it, bending his arm out to the side to straighten it out, before laying it palm-face down on the table.

He knew instantly what they were going to do and he couldn't cease his struggles, only trying to pull his arm away from them, to protect it from their insidious plans.

His hand. Thanos was going to take his hand.

He needed his hand. He couldn't –

Tony was hyperventilating.

Struggling against the Chitauri's grip, he fought them as he tried to stop them from uncurling his fingers so they lay flat.

"No! Not my hands! Anything but my hands!" He was begging. He didn't want to beg. But without his hands he was nothing, even if he lost one hand...

Thanos touched his head. "You have no need to fear. You'll be getting a replacement."

"No! NO!" Tony couldn't stop the uncurling of his fingers.

The alien hand kept his right hand pushed down flat against the board. Another kept his humerus pinned down.

"Please, don't do this!" If he lost his hand he would not be able to create again...

Another Chitauri approached holding a long, thick sword clutched in its hands. Placing it over Tony's wrist, the alien lifted it a tiny bit.

Thanos watched, moving his eyes up to Tony's, who couldn't keep his own eyes off from the location of the sword.

"Take the whole arm."

“NO!” Tony tried to struggle but they were holding him down so tightly as the sword was moved from his wrist to his shoulder. “NO! DON’T!”

“It will hurt more if you struggle,” advised Thanos.

“YOU BASTARD! I’LL GET YOU FOR THIS! I’LL, I’LL – ARGH!”

The arm was removed.

Shock washed over him as intense pain spread through his whole body and blood leaked from the gruesome wound.

Tony sank into oblivion.

## **WAKANDA**

A portal appeared forty minutes later and four Chitauri walked out holding a chest between them. The portal didn’t stay open, closing as soon as they had stepped through into the Wakandan Throne Room.

The four Chitauri were killed quickly and their bodies removed from the Throne Room, whilst the other Avengers and the Guardians gathered around the chest that had been left.

Pepper huddled by Rhodey, fear gnawing in her gut as she looked at the chest.

“Do we open it?” asked Bruce.

Shuri stepped forward, holding a small device in her hand. “It’s just a chest. There isn’t anything sinister about it. But I’m getting an odd reading from it...” she hesitated. “As if...”

“What is it?” Steve asked.

“I’m not sure... But my sensors are not picking up on it being dangerous. It’s safe to open,” answered Shuri.

Rhodey stepped forward, kneeling down and rubbed his fingers across the locking mechanism. He flipped the locks off and pushed open the lid. He stumbled back as his eyes caught sight of the arm that lay at the bottom of the chest. “Oh god... No.”

He tried to shield Pepper but she pushed past, saw the arm and immediately turned around and threw up on the floor. She clutched Rhodey tightly, tears streaming down her face.

As the others crowded around the chest to see what lay inside, all Rhodey could think about was the trauma Tony had suffered because of their choices and what else he may suffer if they continued to defy Thanos.

And he hated that he had let his best friend down.

“There’s a little device here,” said Natasha, reaching down and picking up a circular device from inside the chest.



Shuri quickly ran her scanner over it. "It's safe."

Flipping it open, they heard Thanos' voice echo around the hall. It was a recorded message, aimed at them.

"You defied me, refused to give me my Infinity Stone. Stark lost an arm because of your refusal. I will continue to remove limbs and organs from him until you surrender the Stone to me. If you still defy me, the last thing you will be sent before Stark truly becomes one with the machines is his brain and his heart. Think about that for the next twenty-four hours. It will be a leg next."

Steve retched.

"We can't do this to Tony..." said Rhodey quietly. His eyes were shimmering with tears.

Bruce stepped up, eyes locking with Steve, struggling to hold back the horror at what had been sent to them. "Steve... Now we know what Thanos is prepared to do to Tony to get that Stone. I don't think any of us can sit through this and watch as Tony is delivered to us piece by piece... We have to give Thanos the Stone."

And Steve knew, in that moment, that if he could trade the Stone for Tony in a heartbeat, he would.

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

Erm. Yes. Tony lost his arm. And then Thanos sent it to the others because he's angry the Avengers did not surrender the Mind Stone to him.

Thanos has decided that he'll kill Tony in the most horrible way possible, by turning him into a machine.

I'm not entirely sure where this fic is going, and there may be light at the end of the tunnel, but for now, I don't know...

I hope to update again before the end of January :)

# Plans

## Chapter Summary

The Avengers start to make plans to rescue Tony from Thanos...

## Chapter Notes

A short chapter this time. My chapters will vary in length. :)

Thank you for all the comments so far!

Just a quick opinion for my reviews: I have had a few comments regarding the rating of this story. Should it be kept as it is or be upped to an M? This story is posted over on FF.NET rated as a T as well and I've had no complaints or requests to up the rating so I am seeking opinions before I do so. Thank you :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## SANCTUARY II

When Tony woke, he had hoped having his arm removed had all been a horrible dream Thanos had forced upon him. He was quite horrified to discover that it hadn't been a dream and his captor really had, had his arm removed.

Tony felt sick. He didn't want to look at his right arm or lack of one. He dared not move either.

Someone had transferred him back to his prison cell.

God, his arm.

He closed his eyes again, wishing for darkness to take him again, but no such relief came for him. His right arm... Why? He wanted to cry, he really did, but he dare not show any weakness. What would he lose next? He knew what the stakes were.

If the others gave up the Infinity Stone Thanos would win. He didn't want Thanos to win.

"Better this happens..." he whispered quietly. As much as he didn't want to become a servant of Thanos, he knew it was inevitable unless he found a way to kill himself. With just one arm that would now prove more difficult. His remaining arm he found had been chained to the wall, with a short chain allowing him some movement on the bed he lay upon.

He still avoided looking at his right shoulder, knowing what he would find there. Inevitably he would see it.

*I should just look and get it out the way.*

Tony closed his eyes.

He couldn't.

He couldn't bring himself to turn his head to the right and see his arm gone.

"How are you feeling?"

The tender voice startled Tony. He hadn't heard Thanos arrive.

Slowly, he turned his head and glanced at his captor. "How do you think I feel? You took my arm!"

"It was necessary." The Titan loomed above him. "They would not believe I mean what I say if there were not any consequences of their foolish decisions. Your arm, Stark, is on them. Not mine. It's a leg next. Twenty hours to go before you are back on that table. This time the removal will be more painful."

"I don't think I want to know."

Thanos smirked. "But I'm going to tell you anyway."

Tony didn't want to hear but he couldn't block out the sound of the Titan's voice as he detailed very clearly how his leg would be removed. They would first break both the tibia and the fibula, shattering both bones into pieces, and then they would shatter his kneecap before moving to snap his femur in three places, before finally removing the leg at the hip.

Thanos would also send the Avengers the recording of the leg removal to highlight how serious he was about harming Tony. If he didn't get the Infinity Stone, they would have to live with their actions.

"Do you want to know what will be next after your leg?"

Tony shook his head.

"Either a lung or a kidney. It depends on how much your friend's anger me by refusing again."

"You're insane if you think I can survive all of this," said Tony quietly.

Thanos smirked. "You will. Our methods and technology will ensure you do. The Infinity Stones I have will prolong your life. Even when you are just a heart and brain, you will still live because I command the Stones to keep you alive."

Tony closed his eyes. He didn't want this. He didn't want to survive this. He didn't want to live as artificial intelligence. And then it dawned on him that Thanos was turning him into an A.I. He hadn't considered it from that angle before.

"Look at your arm, Stark."

He opened his eyes and looked at his left arm, determined to avoid looking at his right side.

Thanos audibly sighed, reached over and grabbed Tony's chin, turning his head to the side.

Tony closed his eyes. "Mumf!"

Thanos refused to let go, his fingers squeezing Tony's jaw. "Open your eyes and look at your arm, Stark, or I will have your leg removed now."

Tony opened his eyes.

Thanos let go of his jaw and watched as Tony took in the metallic arm that now protruded from his shoulder joint.

"What?"

"Surprised, Stark?" Thanos sighed. "Your body parts are being replaced. You're not going to be limbless. You are going to become better than you already are."

Tony swallowed.

"Anything which is removed shall be replaced. Your very soul, your intelligence, your memories will all remain intact. I seek to improve you."

"This isn't an improvement," muttered Tony, "this is torture."

"It isn't to me." Thanos moved back. "Unless your friends surrender the stone to me, then that is your fate."

"I don't want it!" Tony retorted, feeling angry that this was happening to him, but also afraid he couldn't do anything to stop it.

"You have no choice," responded Thanos. "Twenty hours, Stark."

Thanos left him, locking the cell door behind him and leaving Tony to wallow in his misery in his cell.

## **WAKANDA**

Pepper had left the throne room after the arrival of the chest, having released herself from the armour she had been wearing so she could flee easily. She needed to get away from them all. She was not surprised to see Peter Parker sitting on the floor, a little way down the corridor, his head buried in his arms. He must have fled as soon as he had seen the arm in the chest. He was still in his Spider-Man suit. No one had been prepared for what was inside of it.

Pepper's own tears had not dried and she still felt sick; the image of Tony's arm in the chest... *Stop thinking about it*, she told herself.

She knelt down to Peter and touched his arm.

He looked up at her. "Miss Potts," he managed, his voice breaking. "I'm fine."

She shook her head. Peter shouldn't have to lie to her. "I don't think any of us are fine after what we just saw." Her stomach felt queasy. She wiped the tears away that were welling in her eyes. She didn't know how she was capable of standing, or of rational thought.

Pepper had always been one to be able to carry on in the face of adversity. When Tony had been in Afghanistan, she'd been working, keeping herself busy and ensuring she kept everything running the way Tony had expected it to be. It had been hard, but she'd survived it. When Tony had gone to space a few days ago, she'd broken down and cried but had gone into work the next day, knowing that being busy helped her. Now she was finding it difficult to remain strong. She could feel herself breaking, her whole body trembling.

"They took his arm," mumbled Peter. "How could they?"

Pepper wasn't sure how to respond to that. "That alien is insane."

"Powerful too," said Peter.

"Peter, we'll get Tony back before he loses anything more. If it is just his arm, things can be done to help him," replied Pepper. Tony wouldn't like it but at least he'd still be alive. Peter looked up at her. "You can't guarantee he won't lose anything more. He wants the Stone. He won't stop until he has what he wants. That's why we fought him on that planet, to stop him from getting the stone from the wizard guy. But... It was all for nothing. He gave the Stone up for Mr. Stark's life... But..." he sniffed, rubbing his nose with the back of his hand, "...this isn't a life Mr. Stark is living now. It's a horror."

Pepper chewed her bottom lip. She knew this Thanos was incredibly dangerous, a psychopath even. "Maybe, but I'm going to fight my hardest to get Tony back. I will not have him returned to me in pieces." Even mentioning more body parts arriving made her feel squeamish. She leaned in closer to Peter. "If we can, we're going to try and convince the Guardians to take us to Thanos' ship."

His eyes widened. "What? But that is a suicide mission!"

Pepper looked up and motioned for Peter to do so as well.

Rhodey stood in front of them. "It is, but Tony is worth it. We'll get him back. Maybe we will propose this idea to Steve and the others."

Peter twisted his head to look between the both of them. "Would they come with us?"

Pepper nodded. "I'm not their greatest fan but I think they would. Tony means a lot to them, even if they haven't shown it in recent years. I think..." she hesitated.

“Think what?” Peter pushed.

“That Steve is ready to do anything that might bring Tony home, even hand over the Infinity Stone if we could,” explained Pepper.

Rhodey shrugged. “Unfortunately, Doctor Strange has hidden the last Infinity Stone somewhere and we have no starting point as to where to start looking. He’s going to talk to Strange about what we do next. If Tony is important to Thanos’ defeat then allowing Thanos to continue taking Tony apart...” he trailed off not wanting to continue.

“The important thing is that we are now in an impossible position,” said Pepper. “I don’t think either of us considered this would happen to Tony.” She could feel the tears welling in her eyes again. “But we have to get him out of there.”

“And Thanos won’t bring us to his ship either,” explained Rhodey, folding his arms across his chest. “So we will have to get there another way. We haven’t asked the Guardians yet if they will help us.”

“Will they?”

Pepper shrugged. “I don’t know. But we can’t sit here and do nothing. I want my fiancé back. I want to marry Tony. And that is not going to happen whilst we sit here and ponder what to do next. We are running out of options, Peter. I’m going to act, whether the others agree with us or not. I’m not going to let Tony suffer anymore.”

- - - - -

Steve approached Doctor Strange who was standing off to the side, his eyes still focused upon the chest, a conflicted and aghast look on his face. None of them wanted to move it, nor did they wish to see what lay within. Steve wanted to forget the image of Tony’s arm but he couldn’t.

“We can’t do this, Strange,” he said quietly. “We have to give him the Stone.”

Strange moved his pupils to Steve’s face. “If we do, people will die. You refused to allow Vision to die when he was willing to, to ensure the destruction of the Stone, and yet when it is Stark who is prepared to die so Thanos does not win, everything changes?”

Steve hung his head. He’d completely done a one-eighty. His whole opinion had changed. He had refused Vision to sacrifice his life before Thanos had arrived in an effort to spare his life. They could have destroyed the stone, stopping Thanos for good... but Steve... No. This was his fault. Wanda hadn’t wanted to kill Vision, not when there had been another way.

Ultimately Vision had been separated from the Stone, yet it only meant Thanos’ efforts were concentrated elsewhere away from Vision. He still had Tony to torture and rip apart as he pleased.

“You said it yourself. Tony is important. If he is truly meant to fight Thanos, him continuing to lose limbs is not going to help us,” said Steve.

Strange sighed. "Our future has already changed. I cannot assume we are on a winning path just because Stark still lives. I agree it is important for him to live... I already gave one Infinity Stone for Stark. What if we hand it over and Thanos kills him? Stark won't be around to help us and we cannot afford to lose him."

Steve leaned back against the wall, turning his head to take in the Doctor's expressions. "Ensuring Tony loses more limbs will mean we lose him too. Somehow we've got to act. We just need a plan which will accomplish both our goals." Steve frowned and glanced up to see Pepper walking across the Throne Room, towards the gathering of Guardians, with Rhodey and the Parker kid at her side.

"I think..." mused Strange, "you may not need to think of a plan. The future Mrs. Stark seems to already have one." He seemed to be rather bemused by the fact.

"Whatever plan it is, I hope it works," replied Steve, moving forward to find out exactly what Pepper had to offer.

Even if they didn't follow her plan, at least it would be a start in rescuing Tony.

They needed some luck after all.

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

Thanos is intent on ripping Tony apart in the worst way possible. He wants to destroy him but ultimately make him suffer. Leaving Tony as just a heart and a brain is entirely feasible I think, considering what Thanos ended up doing to Nebula. She is still alive but more machine than organic. Thanos intends to take Tony that one step further and leave him as just two pulsating organs as part of the membrane of his own ship. It's a fitting punishment for the man who destroyed his army...

Thanos gets his ultimate revenge and he gets to remove Tony as a threat at the same time too... Thanos is quite an insane character to write...

But will Pepper's plan work in rescuing Tony?

We'll see...

I hope to update again in a few weeks :)

# The Snap

## Chapter Summary

Thanos continues to torment Tony and the Avengers attempt a rescue...

## Chapter Notes

Hello all! My apologies for the delay once again. I've really struggled with my writing in February but I think I am back on track. The next chapter of this story is halfway written so I hope to update again next week. I am intending on having this story finished soon, hopefully before Avengers Endgame hits theatres!

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## SPACE

Pepper's plan relied heavily on the Guardian's agreeing to take her to Thanos' exact location. Though initially reluctant, Quill was persuaded to do so because it would be a step further to saving Gamora. They needed to kill Thanos, retrieve Tony and somehow, if they were unable to mortally wound the Titan, would take the Infinity Stones from him.

Steve was to remain behind on Earth despite his protest at wanting to aid Tony. He was the spokesperson of the Avengers ever since they had been alerted to Tony's capture by the Titan. If Steve wasn't on Earth when Thanos next arrived, his suspicions would arise and the last thing they needed was for the Titan to realise something else was afoot. Reluctantly, Steve remained behind with T'Challa, Sam, Bucky, Bruce, Wanda, and Vision.

Pepper, Rhodey, Natasha, Peter Parker (who had refused to stay on Earth) Thor, and Dr. Strange, along with the Guardians left the planet and travelled to where Thanos' ship was currently located. Nebula had provided the coordinates, having come from the place herself when she had escaped Thanos' captivity. Her knowledge of the ship would enable them to sneak aboard and hopefully rescue Tony.

Even if they couldn't get near Thanos, their main objective was liberating their captured friend.

Whilst Steve attempted to deal with Thanos on Earth by giving him the last Infinity Stone, the Wakandans would try to disable Thanos with their advanced technology, almost at the



exact same time Pepper would attempt to prise Tony from his captors.

It was risky with a lot of disadvantages but it was the only option they had.

Even if Thanos did get the final Infinity Stone, they needed Tony.

The Guardians had established a connection with Wakanda, with the help of Shuri, who would alert them to when Thanos arrived in Wakanda. That would be the moment the Guardians would infiltrate his ship.

Now, they waited for the signal to come through, all of them ready to act as soon as it happened. It didn't take long for the signal to come as Shuri's visage appeared via hologram.

*"He's here. Go!"*

At once they moved.

## **WAKANDA**

Thanos arrived once again unaccompanied by Tony.

What remained of the Avengers waited for him in the throne room of Wakanda.

Thanos' eyes roamed around the room as if he was looking for the rest of them. He smirked as he saw Steve standing in the centre of the room. "Your time is up. The future of Stark's leg rests in your hands."

Steve's insides jumped at the thought of opening another chest and seeing Tony's amputated leg in it.

It was as if the Titan had read his mind. "I will make sure you all witness the removal next time..." Thanos's eyes glinted. "Unless..."

"We give you the Stone," stated Steve, his face pale.

Thanos nodded. "You are learning well. The rest of your merry-band is not here? Only a few of you stand before me." His eyes ran collectively over Steve, T'Challa, Sam, Bucky, Bruce, Wanda, and Vision, all of whom wore identical expressions of hatred.

Steve swallowed. He had a feeling the Titan knew what they were attempting to do. "We had to detain them. They were not happy with the decision we have made in the last few hours. They would get in the way of progress to ensure the safety and the future of the universe and of our friend."

Thanos twitched his head, his eyes slitting as he considered the man in front of him.

Steve wanted to attack, to punch, and to injure this Titan before him. To hurt him for everything he had done to the universe at large and for what he had done to Tony. Steve

grimaced. The plan was simple. Thanos would gain the last Infinity Stone. The others should be aboard his ship and be rescuing Tony. They would try to hold the Titan here for as long as possible.

The uncanny feeling was building in his chest as if the Titan had already guessed what their plan would be.

“I’m listening,” motioned the Titan.

Steve reached into his pocket and pulled out a metallic box. Shuri had placed the Infinity Stone within it. He held it out to the Titan who immediately used the other Stones to have the box float over to him.

It landed in Thanos’ Gauntlet-free palm. His fingers crushed the box and the Stone settled on his skin, gently glowing against it, not harming the Titan. He considered it for a few moments, his eyes running over the stone as if he was surprised to see it.

“Didn’t think we’d give it to you, did you?” asked Steve.

“Hmm, your resolve cracked easily all in a desperate attempt to save Stark.” Thanos held the stone up and placed it in the last spot on the Gauntlet. Power ran through his body and Steve winced as a bright light blinded him for a few seconds.

When he opened his eyes again and could focus, Thanos was standing there, holding the Gauntlet at him.

“I thank you for your co-operation in enabling me to achieve my goal.”

“Free Tony!” demanded Steve, his eyes flashing.

Thanos smirked as the Space Stone suddenly glowed. “No. Stark is mine. He destroyed my army years ago. He still requires punishment.”

“NO!” Steve yelled, bringing his arm out to alert the others to try to stop Thanos from leaving.

But his reaction was too slow.

The space portal enveloped Thanos completely and he was gone.

Steve could only stare at the spot where Thanos had stood just moments ago, his heart racing in his chest at how much of a catastrophe this plan had turned out to be. Just one word fell from his lips and it wasn’t one he liked to use.

“Fuck.”

## **SANCTUARY II**

He was going to lose his leg. Tony felt sick at the prospect of what Thanos wanted to do him. He was going to take his organs, pull him apart bit by bit...

He closed his eyes, tears leaking out of the corners of his eyes.

Tony Stark never cried.

He had never allowed himself to.

But this, what was happening to him now, was too much. He couldn't see a way out.

The metallic replacement he had for his arm was not an improvement. It hampered his ability. It prevented him from creating things. His arm... gone, just like that. He didn't want to become a minion of Thanos, forced to do his bidding, programmed to be his servant. He wouldn't be human.

"You should look forward to your enlightenment," said Thanos, strolling into his cell. "You should be honoured I offer you such a fate."

"What? Becoming nothing? Having everything taken from me?" Tony scoffed. Thanos was a monster.

"You'll be a heart and a brain. That is all you need to survive. I look forward to removing them from your body."

Tony felt sick. This again. He didn't want to know the thoughts of the depraved Titan.

"Once you are programmed into a new automated body, I will dispose of what remains of your human body. There will be bits of you left," mused Thanos. He smiled then. "I will make you watch. What remains of the Chitauri after you obliterated them would take pleasure in consuming your remains. Perhaps I will make you watch as they do so. They've already eaten your arm, did you know?"

Tony threw up, green bile splattering on the floor. His stomach empty now, he could not take this...

"Look at me, Stark."

It was a command, not a request.

Reluctantly, Tony raised his head, knowing disobeying Thanos would lead to severe consequences. As he focused his eyes upon the Titan, his eyes widened when he saw the sixth Infinity Stone embedded within his captor's Gauntlet. "No... They didn't."

"They did," smirked Thanos. "Just to save your life. Not that it matters. You will not be returning to them."

"But that was the deal!" stammered Tony.

Thanos laughed. It was cruel and mirthless. “Really? Words are all that matter. How one chooses to interpret them is not my fault if they fail to see the bigger picture. Not once did I ever promise your friends that you would be returned to them. Only your life would be spared.”

Tony swallowed, realisation dawning. “You never intended to let me go, did you?”

A hand reached out to touch Tony’s hair and caressed his skull gently. Despite the tender touch, Tony’s breathing quickened.

“No, I did not. Your friends failed to recognise that. Your life shall be spared so you can spend an eternity with me as just a programme implemented into this ship. A fitting punishment for you after what you did to my army.”

“You have what you want,” whispered Tony. “The Stones... Isn’t winning punishment enough for me?” Tony could feel himself on the verge of tears once again.

“No.” Thanos’ voice darkened. “I could have completed this goal sooner if you had not stopped me on Earth. There is one thing I still need to do before we continue with your incarceration.”

Tony swallowed, his eyes not leaving the Gauntlet.

“Just one snap of my fingers and I will save the entire universe.”

He couldn’t respond. Tony couldn’t speak a word. His heart was beating fast in his chest.

“I wonder whether you will be a victim or if you will survive the culling?” mused Thanos. “No point in removing any more limbs if you do not survive.”

Tony could only watch as Thanos clicked his fingers.

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Surprisingly they had made it into Thanos’ ship without being detected. Nebula had directed them through the garbage chute which was rarely used. It was an entrance exempt from being monitored. She led them through rarely used walkways, through the back corridors of the ship towards the prison area where they hoped to free Tony.

Nebula didn’t know if that was where Tony was being held or not but it was as good a guess as any.

The group had decided to try to avoid rising detection by not attacking anyone they came across unless they absolutely had to.

So far, Nebula and the Guardians had managed to execute two sets of Chituari squads made up of six warriors each, as there had been no alternate route for them to take. They’d killed them swiftly and silently as possible.

“How much further?” asked Pepper.

“Not far,” responded Nebula coldly. “Thanos had plans for Stark, even before he encountered him on Titan.”

Pepper stopped, as did the others.

“What do you mean?” asked Rhodey.

“He knew about Mr. Stark?” swallowed Peter Parker, his voice edging a bit as worry came through.

Strange did not look surprised.

Nebula rolled her eyes in the semi-darkness of the corridor they stood in. “Yes. Stark made himself a target when he threw a missile at the Chitauri army. He wiped out the majority of the race. Only a few remnants remain. Thanos had to spend a few years rebuilding his army because of Stark. He sent out sentries and spies to learn who took out his army. He’s been watching Stark for a long time.”

“The Avengers all contributed to that fight,” said Thor. “Why not seek out the rest of us?”

Nebula smirked. “You didn’t throw a missile at his fleet and destroy it in one go. He hates and admires Stark for that. Even if Thanos succeeded in getting the final stone, he would not return Stark to you.”

“But that was the deal,” Rhodey pointed out, frowning.

“You Terrans are so stupid,” sneered Nebula. “Did he specifically say he would return him to you or was it spare his life?”

The overwhelming silence was enough to convince Nebula of what they had been told.

“What does he plan to do with him?” asked Pepper quietly.

Nebula’s expression hardened. “You don’t want to know. He’s lost an arm already. Thanos will either kill him or force him to suffer for eternity. My bets are on eternity.”

A hand landed on Pepper’s shoulder. She glanced back and saw Rhodey behind her. “We’ll get him back, Pep. We will.”

Pepper couldn’t help the butterflies in her stomach. “I hope so.”

The group began to shuffle forward again, with Nebula darting ahead when Quill’s voice broke through the silence.

“Mantis? Are you alright?”

Everyone stopped and Nebula paused from further up the corridor, her eyes narrowing.

“I feel... strange... I... I...”

And then Mantis's whole body turned grey and her ashes fell to a pile on the grating.

"What!?"

"What the hell?" Quill muttered.

"Dude!" Rocket gaped.

"Thor... What's happening?" asked Rhodey, as another of the Guardians (Drax) simply turned to dust, his own ashes falling to the grating.

"I don't..." Thor's face was white with fear and horror. His eyes moved up to Nebula's who had moved closer, her face clenched tightly as she edged nearer to them.

Groot was next, followed by Dr. Strange and then Peter Parker vanished, his own disappearance taking longer than anyone else, the fear paramount in his face as his whole body collapsed and turned to ash as it mingled with the ashes of the other people who had disappeared in a matter of seconds.

When no one else vanished after Peter, Quill looked up at Nebula.

"What the hell just happened?"

"Thanos," stated Nebula, her voice cold.

"What did he do?" asked Rhodey, horrified. He couldn't take his eyes off the spot where Parker had gone.

"He did what he set out to do. He's got all the Stones. The team on Terra failed."

"No," said Pepper. "They did what they were supposed to do, prevent Tony from being torn apart!"

"Yeah, but how many of them are left if Thanos has done this? Pepper... Thanos could be here now; back on this ship," said Rhodey, glancing up at her. "Saving Tony may not be possible."

"We knew this might happen. We planned for this!" she stated.

"But did we plan to lose half our team?" Thor interjected, looking crestfallen. "Our comrades failed to keep him from carrying out his goal to halve the universe. We are the survivors. Stark could be a victim of it too... We might not find him."

Pepper shook her head. "I know people have just died, but I know Tony is not one of them! He's still here! We have to keep going! Even if Thanos is here, what else can we do? We can try to fix this too!"

"She's right," stated Nebula. "He may have carried out the mission he gave himself, but we can still save the others if we can get our hands on the Gauntlet. We have to keep on moving!"

And so, leaving the pile of ashes behind, they moved forward, fully intent on rescuing Tony and retrieving the Gauntlet from Thanos if he had returned to Sanctuary.

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Much to Tony's dismay, he did not disappear. He was not a victim of Thanos' mercy, as the Titan so kindly put it. It seemed his destiny really was to become a part of Thanos' ship, become a part of an A.I circuit, all for stopping Thanos from taking Earth all those years ago.

Thanos remained in front of him, a look of victory in his face, but his whole body had visibly relaxed. "It's done. My grand task is complete."

"Care to let me go now?" quipped Tony, already knowing the answer.

The Titan reached out and grasped Tony by the chin, tipping his head up. "I'm glad you survived Stark. I had hoped the universe would see fit to spare you."

"I'm not..." Tony dared not jerk his head away, knowing full well that the Titan would just grab him and hold him by his chin.

"It just shows my plans for you are what the universe requires. It agrees with your fate, what I intend to do to you. If it didn't, the universe would have taken you away from me." Thanos smiled.

Tony shivered. "You're insane," he struggled to say through the tight grip on his chin.

"Quite possibly but I have achieved what no one else in the universe is capable of. I am their hero. Their saviour. People live because of me."

"They've died too!" retorted Tony.

Thanos released his chin, scrutinising him with hard eyes. "They died for a purpose, so that others may live."

Tony scoffed, rolling his eyes. "And tearing me apart is for a purpose too?" He couldn't help but try to taunt the Titan back, already knowing what the result would be.

"For my satisfaction, yes. You, Stark, cannot do anything to stop me now. I'm taking away the threat you represent by your mere existence. You are far too intelligent to kill, to allow that magnificent brain of yours to go to waste." Thanos reached out and, once again, caressed Tony's skull. "Your brain I can use and will do so. Perhaps I will even remove it myself."

Tony shivered and pulled his head away from Thanos' gentle touch. "I'd rather you didn't remove anything."

"Pity your wish shall not be granted," smirked Thanos. "Now that I have accomplished my goal, all that remains is to deal with you. I no longer have to remove a limb once every day. I can do it all now. But I'll make sure you are awake for it and feel every bit of pain. You deserve pain, Stark, and I will make you scream until you deign to call me 'Lord' or 'Master'."

Tony tried to push himself back but he had nowhere to run or hide. This was really going to happen.

“Shall we start with the leg or shall I take the other arm first?”

Tony could not bring himself to answer, only attempt to fight when Thanos grabbed him by the ankle and started to pull him out of his cell and back towards the room with the dreaded table in.

There was nothing he could do to change his fate.

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

So, the rescue mission is underway but Thanos snapped his fingers and they lost half their team. The difference to IW is that Quill survived the snap alongside Rocket, the other Guardians perished.

Thanos lied to Tony about the Chitauri devouring his arm. As you guys know. his arm was delivered to the Avengers. It was designed as mental torture for Tony, to make him believe that would happen to all of his limbs.

And Thanos' arm being fine after him doing the Snap... I need his arm to not be affected by the Snap, nor for the Gauntlet to be ruined either so I'm taking creative liberty and it is an AU, so... :D

Next chapter... Who was a victim of Thanos' snap in Wakanda? And will the rescue plan work? Stay tuned....



# Rescue

## Chapter Summary

Pepper and the surviving team attempt to rescue Tony, whilst the Wakandan-based Avengers receive a shock of their own.

## Chapter Notes

Good news! This story will have a total of 12 chapters! I am currently writing chapter 11 so I hope to have this story finished this weekend!

Everything is coming to a close...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## WAKANDA

Steve was at a complete loss. He didn't know what to do. His eyes remained focused upon the space where Thanos had so recently stood. They had screwed up. They hadn't delayed Thanos for long. He'd departed and taken the Stone with him. Now he had all of them. Their plan was falling apart around them.

"Cap? What do we do now?" asked Sam, walking towards him, apprehension evident on his face.

Steve's shoulders slumped. What could they do? The others had already left the planet. They were stuck here with no way to reach their location.

"We can't do anything," stated Wanda evenly. "We're stuck here unless someone here can travel across space."

"That is beyond our capability," said T'Challa. "My sister, as brilliant as she is, has yet to invent a craft capable of interstellar travel."

Vision moved towards Steve. "Then we have to hope the others will succeed."

A hand landed on his shoulder and Steve looked back to see Bucky standing there. "You feel guilty, don't you?"

Steve nodded. How could he not? "Would this have happened if the Avengers had not broken away? Would Tony be in the position he is now if we had not fought? I want to be with the

others, rescuing him.”

“You were better off here,” replied Bucky. “Thanos needed to know we were not trying to trick him.”

Steve scoffed. “I think he probably realised we tricked him. We should have tried to fight him instead before surrendering the stone.”

“I think we can all agree Thanos would not have fought us if we had tried,” said T’Challa. “We’ve played our part, the others now have to pl-“ T’Challa stopped midsentence. “Wha-?”

Looking up at the King of Wakanda, Steve’s jaw dropped as he saw T’Challa’s body disintegrate into black ashes. “What the-”

“Steve?” Bucky sounded uncertain.

Steve whipped his eyes back to his friend, just in time to see Bucky disappear in front of him, quickly followed by Sam.

Wanda stepped forward. “What’s happening?” She was looking at her own hands, as if expecting them to turn to dust as well. “Vis?” She glanced at the Android.

Steve swallowed. “Bucky?” he whispered. He knelt down and brushed his hand through the ashes of what had once been his friend. He felt dizzy. They’d just been talking... What had happened?

“Thanos...” swallowed Bruce. “This is what he wanted to do... He’s won. We failed...” Bruce collapsed back against the wall. “He’s done what he set out to do...”

Raising his head, Steve caught Bruce’s eyes. “What about the others? Is... is this happening across the world?”

“If I’m right... it would be the entire universe...” replied Bruce. “This is what we’ve fought to stop but we failed...”

“All to save Stark,” grated Wanda.

Steve flung around at Wanda. “Don’t say that! We did this to save Vision too! Tony is just as important as Vision is to the team!”

“No matter what we did, I think Thanos would have won regardless,” answered Bruce. “None of us were a match for him. Even the Hulk.”

But Vision leaned forward. “But one can argue that Mr Stark was a match for him. This is why this is happening to him. Wanda, you need to let go of your hate for him.”

Wanda didn’t reply verbally but inclined her head.

“Steve?” asked Bruce, “what do we do now?”

Steve raised his head, locking eyes with his friend. “I don’t know, Bruce, I don’t know.” His gaze returned once more to the pile of ashes that were once Bucky Barnes.

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## **SANCTUARY II**

Thanos’s grip on his ankle was tight and he showed no care for dragging Tony across the floor. Tony tried to struggle, even tried to twist his leg but knew if he did, he’d end up breaking his leg. If he did break his leg it would be impossible to flee if he was given an opportunity to do so. Considering the Titan intended on taking his leg at some point, the option to flee, or even attempt it, was rapidly declining.

The Titan seemed to be taking a while to return to the room, or did it feel like that because Tony was dreading it?

*God, my leg. Not my leg...*

His whole body was at stake here.

“I think I shall take the leg first,” said Thanos conversationally.

Tony closed his eyes, not wanting to think of his leg being taken and how Thanos had described it being done. “Can we talk about something else other than the imminent removal of one of my limbs?” If Thanos wanted to talk...

“How about how much time you forced me to waste in creating another army because of your little stunt? The Chitauri were warriors eager for battle, to prove themselves to the universe. But you, just one insignificant human being, was able to destroy the majority in one single blow. Their species will never recover from the atrocity you forced upon them. I was forced to seek alternative creatures. I opted to bioengineer them. The Outriders are a force no one can hope to overcome when deployed effectively. If you had not bought the missile through the portal, I would have achieved my quest years ago. The universe would have been in balance.”

“No one will thank you for what you’ve done!” retorted Tony.

“They will. I will be their saviour.”

Tony rolled his eyes. “You just killed their mothers and fathers, their sons and daughters, their husbands and wives, their aunts and uncles, their cousins....”

“I saved them.”

“You keep telling yourself that!” snapped Tony angrily. Thanos was deluded if he thought the universe would ever be grateful for what he had done.

“I was the only one who could see what they could not. I have assured the continuity of life in the universe.” Thanos dragged Tony around the corner. “Without me life would simply have imploded and cease to exist.”

Tony wanted to retort but was the point when Thanos was convinced otherwise?

“I lost my planet. I could have saved them. They failed to listen to my humane method in ensuring their continued existence. Stark, you and I are alike.” Thanos paused, dropping Tony’s leg and turned to face him. “We both want to save our planets. I failed in mine but you still have the chance to save yours.” Thanos tilted his head to the side. “Or did until I did it for you. If we had met under different circumstances, I’m certain we would have been allies. It is a shame our paths crossed as adversaries instead. The respect I have for you is high, which is why you deserve to live, despite what I plan to do to you.”

“You’re crazy,” whispered Tony. “You talk of respecting me but you still plan to tear me apart in the most inhumane way. You want me to suffer but claim to respect me? It’s madness!”

“I can respect you and still tear you apart,” stated Thanos. “Do you know what would have happened if I had killed you on Titan?”

Tony shook his head. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know but expected to find out.

“You would have felt nothing. I would have removed your soul and sent it onwards. I would have used Reality to heal your body from its injuries and make you presentable. Then I would have sent you back to Earth for the proper burial you deserve.”

“Then why not do that now?” swallowed Tony. Thanos was truly a complexing figure.

“Because I promised not to kill you. I promised to spare your life. I keep my promises. If I cannot kill you then I shall ensure you suffer for your effort in destroying my army. Your Sorcerer friend believed he was helping you. He only made your fate worse.”

“Guess I’ll have to thank him later...” muttered Tony.

“If he’s still alive,” interjected Thanos. He resumed pulling Tony by the leg.

“Can we just not reach the room?” asked Tony, trying to interject humour into his dire situation.

“No.”

“I think you should leave Tony here.”

Tony twisted his neck to look behind him and saw to his surprise Pepper standing there, with her armour on and her eyes blazing as she held up an arm and pointed it at the Titan.

“Pepper? What are you doing here?”

“Rescuing you!” she answered. Her eyes tried to avoid looking at his metallic arm.

Tony’s ankle was dropped again and he took the opportunity to roll away as Thanos aimed the Gauntlet at Pepper and fired at her. “NO! Pepper!”

But she ducked, falling to her front and reaching out to grab Tony’s hand. “I’m here for you. You’re coming with us!”

He couldn't believe his luck. She was here. But his thoughts quickly returned to Thanos.  
"He'll kill you!"

Pepper's face hardened. "I'm not letting him take you apart piece by piece," she replied. "I'm done with sitting on the side-lines. It's my turn to rescue you!" She grabbed him by the back of his shirt, pulling him up. "Come on!"

"But-" He didn't understand. Why was Thanos not stopping them?

"The others have him distracted," she smiled, as she tugged Tony down the corridor. "I'm getting you to safety. He's not going to hurt you again, Tony, I promise!"

"Pep..." Tony couldn't believe this was happening. It wasn't a dream, was it?

"You're in shock," she noted. "This has happened so fast for you."

Tony struggled to walk and Pepper lifted his remaining flesh arm over her shoulder to carry him away, supporting him with her other hand.

"Don't look back. Just keep moving forward."

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Thor crashed through the grating, landing with a thump in front of Thanos. "You picked on the wrong Avenger!" he yelled, lightening fizzing around him, his axe swinging in the air, as he twisted to bring *Stormbreaker* up at Thanos' neck.

The Titan was quick and stepped back, the axe swishing past his flesh. "Fools! I have already won! Be thankful the universe spared you!"

"If the universe made its selections of people, Thanos, then it should have taken you!" spat Thor angrily.

"I would have been grateful to be chosen," intoned Thanos, stepped back as Thor advanced again.

"The universe would have been better off without you!" hissed Nebula, leaping forward, lashing out at her father with two sharp swords.

"I'm surprised the universe thought you worthy!" retorted Thanos, swinging around, the Infinity Gauntlet rising and all six stones activated. "None of you know how lucky you are to live in this new world! Embrace it!"

"You killed Gamora!" Quill was there, firing his blaster at the Titan, skidding around the corner, eyes blazing in fury.

Then Rhodey leaped down through the hole in the grating Thor had crashed through, raising the blasters and guns on his armour and pointing them straight at the Titan.

It was a free-for-all. Thanos was being attacked on all sides, and he dare not use the full energy of the Infinity Stones, lest he destroyed the ship. The last thing he wanted was to kill himself now he had succeeded in his mission. He could retire after he had finished his business with Stark of course.

They fought, pushing Thanos back along the corridor with the combined weight of blaster-shots from the others and physical hits from Thor.

“YOU CANNOT BEAT ME!” yelled Thanos, and he swept his arm in an arc, sending out a shock wave from the Power Stone.

Every attacker was flown back, crashing through walls or flung up through the ceiling or flung down through the grating into the corridor below. He’d stunned them all with one fell swoop.

He moved through them, pausing enough to glance over his shoulder at Thor. “Stark is mine. Do not interfere!”

But they did not take his command.

Nebula was the first to get to her feet, swaying on her feet. “No!”

Thanos clenched his fist. “Fine. I’ll get rid of you all first if you seek to take away what is rightfully mine!”

“You have no right to Tony!” retorted Rhodey, raising one of his weapons systems to aim straight at Thanos’ head.

Thanos smirked. “I do. I own him.”

“What? You think you own him because you took off his arm?” Rhodey shouted, firing a hundred bullets at once at Thanos but the Titan merely created a portal to absorb all of them in. “He is not YOURS!”

“He is an Avenger!” Thor bellowed, now recovered from the shock wave. “And we will stop you from harming him further!” Thor leaped, swinging his axe and flung it towards Thanos, letting it fly through the air.

A beam of light shot from the Gauntlet and cascaded ahead of them, clashing against the axe. Thanos’ hand was vibrating and something was stopping him from simply stopping the axe. It kept pushing back against the power of the stones!

And then Thanos’ head was pulled back as someone leaped onto his back, fingernails scrabbling into the flesh of his neck and then he felt pain and the white light from the axe vanished and then he saw blood dripping down, and he realised the axe was embedded within his chest and so was a knife in his throat, courtesy of Nebula who had jumped onto his back.

Thor strode forward. “I told you before you would pay for that!” The God’s hand found the edge of the axe and he pushed it into Thanos’ chest further. “This is for Loki, for Stark and for all the people you killed today!”

Thanos' mouth hung open in shock. The pain...

He stumbled back, the feeling of weakness in his legs spreading through them.

He blinked, his vision beginning to fade but he found the strength for one last sentence and act. "You should... You should... Should... have aimed for the head!"

The Space Stone and Time Stone glowed and Thanos fell back through it, disappearing from the sight of the others.

"NO!" Thor leapt forward but was too late to follow. His axe dropped to the floor, covered in the blood of Thanos.

"Where did he go?" panted Rhodey. "Is he dead?"

Thor shook his head. "No... He reversed his body. I saw it as he fell backwards. He used the Time Stone to heal his mortal wounds... But the background of where he was going... It looked familiar."

"Thor... where is he going?" Rhodey asked, worry evident in his voice.

Thor lifted his face. "Close to where we docked our ship, he's going after Stark and Potts."

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Pepper helped Tony walk. He was having trouble, stumbling every few steps and he was quite a dead-weight, though the suit she wore more than compensated for that and helped her to support him. Without it, he'd have collapsed as she wouldn't have been able to hold him up.

"How can you be here?" asked Tony quietly, his mind buzzing. He still couldn't believe she was here. Was this all a dream and was it one he would wake up from and find himself legless?

"We have a ship," answered Pepper. "We're getting you out of here. I'm taking you home."

Tony swallowed. "My arm... It's gone."

"I know. Don't think about it," she advised, though he could see how green she looked.

"He just chopped it off..." Tony shook his head. "He's adamant about tearing me apart. He won't stop, Pep. He won't stop coming after me. There is only so much you can do to hold him back."

Pepper shifted her grip on his arm. "We're not aiming to hold him back this time, Tony."

Tony stiffened. "Then what...?"

"He's too much of a threat to leave alive. We've got to kill him this time. If the others succeed, he won't be a threat to you anymore. He won't come after you." Her voice

hardened. “And he won’t tear you to pieces either. I’ll make sure of that.”

“And what do you believe you can do against me?”

“No...” Pepper’s voice hissed; her eyes wide.

Tony trembled. He couldn’t help being scared of this mad Titan. His stomach felt tight with anxiety. He couldn’t help it. This alien terrified him.

They glanced over their shoulders and saw Thanos standing behind them, the Gauntlet raised and pointed at them.

“I will give you one choice.”

“We don’t take bargains from you!” cursed Pepper, turning Tony around so they could face Thanos together, despite the fact she was still supporting him. With her free arm, she raised her hand and powered up her Gauntlet, ready to fire at Thanos. “Don’t come any closer!” Her helmet slid back into place covering her furious features.

“I’m not giving you a bargain,” stated Thanos calmly.

The bad feeling in his abdomen intensified. It was if there was a switch inside Tony’s brain that had already told him what Thanos was going to demand. He braced himself for what he already knew what had to be coming.

“Surrender to me willingly Stark, and your woman will live.”

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

Yeah, so because Vision didn't die, it altered who would be affected by the Snap so Wanda survived.

Plus, Thanos has an unhealthy obsession with Tony... But I think we all knew that, right?

Next chapter will be posted next week! :)



# The Gauntlet

## Chapter Summary

Tony considers Thanos' offer...

## Chapter Notes

Sorry guys for not updating last week. Things happened and I just couldn't. Good news is, is that I have finished writing this story, so there are another 2 chapters to post!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## SANCTUARY II

“Surrender to me willingly, Stark, and your woman will live.”

Tony’s breathing halted. He had known this was what Thanos would want from him. That was all the Titan was interested in. Him, and him alone. No one else. He’d gladly let the others go if Tony stayed with him. But staying with him meant he’d become a part of Thanos’ life forever, tormented for an eternity just for destroying his army and for daring to fight back on Titan. It still scared him that Thanos had considered him enough of a threat to want to personally kill, even after having defeated him.

“Don’t you dare agree, Tony,” said Pepper. Her face was still obscured by the helmet she wore but there was a determination in her voice that Tony would not give himself up just for her. “I’m not going to let you suffer.”

“Even if it means he kills you and still takes me back?” asked Tony. The last thing he wanted was for Pepper to die. “He won’t kill me, Pep. But he’ll kill you.” He hated to admit this but his fears were coming to the forefront. “I can’t let you die.”

“Then its either we die together or live together. I’m not leaving without you,” she stated.

Tony swallowed, his eyes focused on Thanos who was watching them and waiting for their answer. He seemed quite happy to wait as they debated between them.

“If we die together, we’d have to....”

“I know.”

They’d have to kill themselves. Die together in space.

“We’re close to the outer walls of the ship,” said Pepper. “I can blast it open... We’ll be sucked out into space. I can open up my helmet and we’d die together. Maybe take this one with us too,” she indicated Thanos who abruptly laughed.

“I would be able to stop you from killing yourselves. All I’d have to do is use the Space Stone to make a portal and Stark would fall into it and back into a place of safety. You, on the other hand,” the Titan’s gaze now lingering on Pepper, “I would allow to suffocate to death. Attempting to kill yourselves will do you no favours.”

“Guess that idea is out then,” gritted Tony. He couldn’t see a way out of this, unless a distraction came along and stopped Thanos, but how likely would that be? “Let’s say I agree to this,” he began as he and Pepper started to walk backwards, trying to keep their distance from Thanos, “what would happen to Pepper? Would you let her go free on Earth or would she remain here?”

“She’d be allowed to return to Earth,” said Thanos. “I am not cruel.”

“That’s a joke,” spat Pepper. “You are cruel! Especially with what you plan to do to Tony!”

“Cruel to him because he deserves it. You, on the other hand, do not deserve cruelty,” stated Thanos.

Pepper fired a blast at Thanos, who merely stepped to the side. He didn’t retaliate.

“ALL TONY DID WAS DEFEND HIS HOME FROM YOU!” shouted Pepper vehemently. “He does not deserve cruelty! If anyone deserves cruelty, it is YOU!” Another repulsor blast erupted from her palm, only this time Thanos created a small portal which sucked the blast through and out to behind Pepper, narrowly avoiding their heads.

Thanos had changed the course of the bolt, sending it back to them.

“Do that again and the next blast you send my way will be deflected into you. Or even Stark. He is unprotected. How would you feel if you were the cause of further injury?” Thanos asked, tilting his head to the side.

“Pepper, don’t,” whispered Tony. He didn’t want her hurt. “Don’t let him get to you.”

“I can do this the hard way or the easy way. You have no advantage over me, human. Stark is mine. I would prefer the easy way. And I’d rather not kill you but if I have to, I will.” Thanos’ eyes locked with Tony’s. “Now, Stark, surrender or I’ll make you watch her die.” He raised the Gauntlet and pointed it straight at Pepper.

Tony tried to pull away from Pepper. “I have to...”

“No!” She was adamant to prevent him from surrendering but he couldn’t bear to see her die.

“How do you think I’d feel if I have to watch you die over and over because you won’t let me sacrifice myself?” he asked her. Fear was still bubbling in his stomach. “Let me save you!”

“No!” Pepper’s voice was filled with anger. And she fired again.

Thanos did exactly what he promised, used an Infinity Stone to fire the shot back at them, but Tony dragged Pepper down. The repulsor blast impacted against Pepper's suit, as Thanos had directed the bolt onto Tony's position, but pulling Pepper's down with him had protected him and she had taken the full brunt of the hit.

He lost his grip on her and Pepper went rolling to the side.

Tony crashed to the floor, wincing in pain. His body had been abused too much the last few days. Getting to his feet, he found Thanos standing over Pepper's motionless form, raising the Gauntlet as if to execute her. "WAIT! STOP! PLEASE!"

Turning his head ever so slightly, the Titan spoke in a dark voice. "I'm listening."

"Please! Don't hurt her! Send her back to Earth! I'll stay with you! I won't fight you! I'll accept my destiny at your side... Just... don't hurt her. Please. Send her back..." Begging wasn't something he really wanted to do but Pepper... He loved her. He didn't want anything to befall her. She didn't deserve this.

"I have your word?" Thanos hadn't moved.

"Tony.... don't..." Pepper mumbled. Her helmet flashed up and he saw her face. Her cheeks were tear-stained and her left arm was reaching out for him. "Please... Don't do this... Don't let me live without you..."

Tony's throat caught. His eyes found the Titan. "Please... send her back... and, if you can, wipe her memory of me... Please..."

"You ask a lot of me, Stark."

Tony held his breath, wondering what the Titan's decision would be.

"I am, however, merciful. I will honour your request."

A sigh of relief. Pepper would be safe. She wouldn't remember him. She'd be able to move on without him, live her life. Be normal for once, instead of stuck inside his crazy world. Even though others would remember him too... They would still try to rescue him, regardless of what happened here.

"The Avengers will continue to come for me," said Tony, hating every word that left his mouth. "They have to forget me too..." He was condemning himself to death with no hope or rescue.

"I will ensure they are affected too," stated Thanos. "I would rather they did not continue to oppose me. All it will do is earn their deaths at my hands."

"Tony..." Pepper gasped.

Tony bowed his head. "I'm sorry, Pepper... It's the only way..."

She shook her head, trails of her hair coming loose. "No."

As Thanos turned his attention back towards Pepper, there was an almighty crash and the ceiling came crashing down upon the Titan, knocking him to the side, as Thor thundered down, swiftly followed by Rhodey, Nat, Quill, Rocket and Nebula.

Pepper scrambled away and Tony sprinted towards her, reaching out for her hand and pulling her with him.

“Tony!” she gasped. “How could you?”

“I wanted to save you,” he answered. “I would do anything to make sure you lived, even if it meant you had to forget me!”

Tears fell from Pepper’s eyes. “We do this together, Tony, or not at all.”

“We have to beat him,” said Tony, pulling her back further, as the others fought Thanos, trying to subdue him. There was so little space that Thanos dare not use the stones to their full potential in the event he killed himself by tearing the ship apart. “We have to get the Gauntlet... We nearly got it from him on Titan... But we have no way of making him sleep again like we did before...” He cast his eyes around. “And I have nothing to fight with...”

“Maybe this isn’t your fight,” she said. “You are only human, Tony.” Pepper looked up at him.

“Only human?” he retorted. “This particular human has a crazy alien mad-man after him.” His eyes looked down at the Arc Reactor sitting in Pepper’s chest piece of her suit. “You know... this human may have a brilliant idea...”

“I hope it isn’t as bad as your last one...” she quipped, dragging him down as Nat was thrown over their heads.

Natasha winced, cursed and then got to her feet. “I hope you two have a plan of sorts!” She retrieved her batons and was about to leap back into the fray when Tony stopped her with his metallic arm.

“Don’t. I have a plan.”

Natasha’s eyes widened. “Will it work?”

“I hope it will,” said Tony. “Stay back.” He turned to Pepper again. “I need your Arc Reactor from the suit. It’s nanotech, right?”

“It is,” she confirmed. “Very handy. I’m glad you made one for me... despite my own reservations I’ve had about them.”

He smiled. “Pep... All I want is to protect you... Keep you safe...”

“And marry me, I hope,” she quipped back, as she instructed the nanonites to retreat back into the Arc Reactor casing, before removing the Reactor strap-on from her chest and passed it to Tony. She was now defenceless but the fighting between Thor and Thanos was still on-going, giving Tony the time he needed.

“We should have just done this on Titan...” Tony strapped the Arc Reactor around his chest, and pressed the Reactor. The nanonites started to crawl all over his body, adjusting to his body frame, though the suit remained purple - the colour he had chosen for Pepper.

“What’s your plan?” asked Nat, now kneeling down beside them, keeping one eye out on the battle before them.

“We need that Gauntlet. We can’t pull it off him. So we have to....”

“Cut it off...” breathed Pepper, her face shining. “That’s brilliant!”

“Yeah, I just hope the nanonites are strong enough to be able to cut through his arm. I might have to make myself totally defenceless just to reinforce the blades. He’s strong, impossibly strong. He’s holding back here because of the ship we are on, but on Titan he didn’t hold back. Well, he did to start with, then we pissed him off.” Tony grinned. He tried to ignore the metallic arm he had. It didn’t feel right for it to be covered with the nanonites but he had no choice but to use both his arms. He needed to if he had any chance of stopping Thanos for good. “Nat, keep Pepper safe.”

Stepping forward, now encased in purple Iron Man armour, Tony shouted out to Thanos. “HEY! THANOS!”

With a swipe of his arm, Thanos threw Thor, Rhodey, Quill, Rocket and Nebula back; all of them sprawling on the deck in front of Tony’s armoured feet. “Stark.”

“You and me! Leave the others out of this!”

Thanos grinned. “You can’t beat me, Stark! As I said before, surrender and they shall be spared!”

Gritting his teeth, Tony glared at his captor. “NO!”

“Then I will just defeat you again!” roared the Titan, the Stones in the Gauntlet lighting up.

Tony smirked. “No, you can’t, because you are limited to the space we are in. You cannot utilise the full power of the Stones here.” Why was he talking? He should be attacking.

“Then I shall transport us to a planet where we can fight at full power.”

“No,” replied Tony, shaking his head. “Leaves you with an advantage. I’m not at full power. I’ve a limb missing and I have no idea how this arm is even going to work with the suit, or if it will properly. We both have disadvantages here!”

Thanos stood straight and tall. “Very well. Fight here we shall.”

Tony swallowed. Adrenaline pumped through his veins. He felt this was going to be a bad idea.

Thanos charged, swinging his arm around, aiming to punch Tony on the side of his head.

He'd left his face unprotected but had the rest of his body covered. Tony ducked, sliding underneath the punch and coming up behind him, firing his two hand Repulsors at the Titan.

Thanos whipped the Gauntlet back around and shot Tony directly in the suit with the Power Stone.

Tony flew back, hitting the wall and denting it. Damn it! He cursed inwardly. He had to get to the arm.

But how?

And that was when Nebula leapt up from her position on the floor, twisting around and locking her legs around Thanos' neck. Two sharp knives descended and sunk in beneath the flesh of both of his shoulders.

Thanos screamed, attempting to throw the cybernetic woman from his shoulders, but she hung on stubbornly.

He couldn't move his arms up, the knives having severed through muscles and ligaments.

Thanos couldn't even clench his fist and he tried. Nebula's attack had disabled Thanos' ability to even make a fist, stopping him from using any of the Stones.

This was the chance he had been waiting for.

Tony leaped, bringing one arm over his head and the other underneath, reinforcing the blades he created with more nanonites, reducing his armour until all of them had gone into the swords. He brought his arms together, slicing through skin, muscles, ligaments and bone as Thanos' arm fell, the Gauntlet falling to the floor.

Tony landed on his feet, the suit once again retracting around him, until he was covered again, save for his face.

Nebula was still on Thanos' shoulders, but the Titan had fallen to his knees, gasping as he looked in surprise at his left arm.

"An arm for an arm," stated Tony coldly. Now he and Thanos were the same.

"Why?" breathed Thanos.

Tony walked forward slowly. "Because what you've done is wrong. Killing all those people doesn't save the universe. This is why you wanted me dead originally. You feared what I could do to stop you. I guess that wizard saw this." Tony bent down to the Gauntlet, seeing with surprise that Thanos' arm had disintegrated into ash inside the glove.

"You cannot wield it. You will die doing so!" stated the Titan, his breathing come in large gulps as he struggled to breathe.

Nebula's knives lay at his throat. She was waiting to make the final kill.

“If that is to be my fate, then so be it,” replied Tony quietly. “Strange saw this. This is why he bargained for my life. He knew what I was capable of. Someone has to make the sacrifice to bring everyone back. He knew it would be me.” He glanced back at Pepper. He saw Nat holding her back, but Pepper’s eyes were wide. “I’m sorry.”

The Gauntlet lay on the floor.

“Stark, no!” Thor sat up, moving forward at speed but Tony reached the Gauntlet first.

The Gauntlet had been made for Thanos’ left arm. Tony’s robotic right arm and hand was not compatible with the Gauntlet. He only had a moment’s hesitation before he picked up the Gauntlet with his right hand and pushed his left arm into the Gauntlet.

It was too big for him but it seemed to shrink and fit around his hand.

Immense pain erupted through his arm. Agony, screeching pain that didn’t seem to stop.

Tony was screaming and energy crackled around him.

His vision blurred and he could see Thanos laughing.

He closed his eyes as colours blurred in his vision. His arm burned with fire and his heart beat faster as he sought to control the energy.

*I need... I need to reverse what he did!*

He could hear Pepper calling his name but he couldn’t stop. Struggling, he finally moved his arm upwards and held it out in front of him. He twisted his fingers and then –

*SNAP!*

There was a colossal explosion in his head. He saw stars. His breath was stolen from him and he was falling... falling into darkness.

He barely felt his body hit the floor of the deck before the darkness claimed him.

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

I liked writing that battle. Tony and Nebula tag-team. I hope that happens in Endgame!

Next chapter will be posted later this week! :)

Until then,





# The Arm

## Chapter Summary

There are consequences to using the Gauntlet...

## Chapter Notes

Sorry for the late update! Had a funny head all last week and couldn't really stand to look at my computer so I couldn't update!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## SANCTUARY II

As soon as Tony's body dropped to the grating, Pepper pulled herself free from Natasha's grip and ran towards Tony, falling to her knees and turning his head to face hers. "TONY!" she called, tears streaming down her cheeks. "Please! Wake up!" Her eyes ran over his chest which was moving up and down slowly.

She didn't hear the loud thump as Thanos' headless body hit the floor, nor did she take notice of Nebula continuing to stab the dead Titan in the chest, in the arms and in the legs, nor did she pay attention to Rhodey or Thor who gathered around her. Her only focus was Tony.

His body was quivering, shaking underneath her grip. "Tony, please... Wake up... please..."

Someone was shaking her shoulder. "Pepper..."

"I'm not leaving him!" she shouted.

"We're not. We just need to get that thing off of him."

The voice, calm and gentle surprised her. It was Natasha.

Gently, she pulled Pepper away from Tony's body.

Pepper's eyes fell upon the Gauntlet, still covering Tony's left hand. She could see burnt flesh on the skin just above where the Gauntlet sat. "His arm... Had he..." she swallowed, not wanting to think of the cruelty of what he could still suffer just by wielding the Gauntlet.

The Stones themselves were no longer glowing, as if they had been drained of all power. The Gauntlet had shrunk around Tony's hand, and as Thor reached for the fingertips of the

Gauntlet, Rhodey held Tony's arm completely still.

The Gauntlet was slowly pulled off of Tony's arm revealing a black and, what was quite clearly, a dead arm. Burnt and black, it would be completely useless to him when he woke.

"Oh no..." whispered Pepper. Nat didn't stop her going to Tony's side. She knelt down beside him, stroking the hair out of his eyes. He was still unconscious. Perhaps that was a mercy, considering what had happened to him.

In taking the path he had done so back in New York when Doctor Strange had visited them on their morning jog, Tony had started down the path that would lead him to becoming armless.

She couldn't help the tears that continued to flow down her cheeks as she hugged him. Right now, at this very moment, she wished that this had all been a horrid dream and that she would wake up from it at any moment.

But it wasn't.

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The first thing Peter realised when he woke up was that several of their team members were missing. He felt weird. What had happened? He looked at his fingers, expecting to see them dissipate in front of him before the rest of his body did so. But they didn't. He could still move his fingers and nothing changed.

"What... What happened?" asked Peter as he looked around at his comrades. He saw Doctor Strange there, as well as most of the Guardians with the exception of Quill and Rocket and Nebula. "Where is everyone else?"

Strange slowly got to his feet and offered a hand to Peter. "Here you are, kid."

"Thanks," said Peter, as he was helped to his feet. "Why do I feel like we've just come back?" It was an odd feeling but it seemed to be the best way to describe how he felt right now. All of his senses were tingling and he felt super-sensitive to what was going on around him.

"We did just come back," stated Strange.

"What do you mean?" The bug lady, Mantis, cocked her head to the side in confusion. "The other Peter is not here..."

"We died," explained Strange. "Thanos won."

"But if he won why are we still here? We can't have died!" stated Drax, folding his arms across his chest. "You talk no sense!"

Strange shook his head. They had got used to the obscure things Drax had said before the battle on Titan. "We are still here because what he did was reversed. We were brought back. The others are not here. They went on ahead to proceed with the plan."

“They could have been the ones who died instead of us,” said Drax.

“Don’t... don’t you feel weird?” asked Peter. “Like something doesn’t feel right?”

Drax stared at him in confusion. “I’m alive. Of course, I feel fine!”

“Shouldn’t... shouldn’t we go and help the others?” If Pepper and the others had gone on ahead to find Mr. Stark...and had encountered trouble, they might need their help!

“We should move on ahead and find the others,” said Strange, backing Peter up. His cloak swished behind him as he moved past the others and started walking confidently down the dark and bulky corridor ahead.

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His head felt fuzzy upon waking. His eyesight was blurry and Tony wanted to sink back into oblivion. He tried to stay awake but immense and then dull pain spread up his left arm. He cried out, his body buckled and he sank back into oblivion, unaware that Pepper was beside him, gently stroking his head as he suffered from the pain.

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## **WAKANDA**

Steve was not accustomed to waiting. His eyes found it difficult to stray from the piles of ashes that were once his friends. Would he ever see them again? He hoped so. He didn’t like sitting around and doing nothing. He needed to be in the heart of the action. At least he would be more useful there than he was here.

Why had he allowed the others to convince him to stay behind? Sure he was the face of the Avengers but didn’t that mean his place was on the battlefield?

Granted, they had not expected Thanos to flee so quickly. They had been trying to get him to stay with them as long as possible. The others had needed the time to get Tony free and it seemed they had failed when their comrades had turned to dust around them. The waiting game was hard, not knowing what was happening, and knowing he couldn’t help. Bruce was staying silent beside him. He must be feeling the same. Unable to help and left behind, though he figured Bruce preferred that.

Vision and Wanda were across the room, talking quietly with one another. He’d heard brief snippets of conversation, mainly about Tony and how Wanda had misjudged him and refused to see him for the person he was, rather than what she had been led to believe.

Steve hated the way things had ended between him and Tony. He hoped they’d be able to talk again once Tony was rescued.

*If he’s rescued...*

No. He wouldn’t settle for anything less than Tony being rescued and the others returning safely to Wakanda.

“Steve!” Bruce shouted, grabbing his arm, pointing to the mounds of ash that were scattered around the room. “Look!”

Steve turned his bright blue eyes towards the dust where Bucky had once stood and watched as the pieces began to mold together again, forming the shape of a body and then detail began to fill in and the features appeared in the face before the dust merged entirely, completing its rebuilding of its human.

There, in front of Steve, was Bucky Barnes and to the left were Sam and T’Challa, their bodies now completely restored.

They all woke at the same time, groaning and confused over what had happened.

“Bucky!” Steve rushed forward and knelt down beside his friend. “You’re back!”

“I’m... back?” his friend whispered, shaking his head. “Steve... what happened?” He looked at his hands. “The last thing I remember is fading away...”

Steve couldn’t help smiling in relief. “They did it. This means they won! They stopped him!”

“Did I die?” asked Bucky. He cast his gaze around the room at the others.

“Steve? Vision? Wanda?” Sam slowly got to his feet, stumbling, almost dizzy. “What... what happened?”

“I fear we missed a lot...” rasped T’Challa. “Did we?”

“You did,” replied Steve. “I’m not sure I can explain this well.”

“Then do your best, Captain,” stated T’Challa evenly. “Even if you have to guess.”

Thankfully for Steve, Bruce stepped forward. “We knew Thanos wanted to kill half the universe. I think he succeeded which is why you three disappeared. Whatever happened up in space... Presumably on his ship reversed it. The others must have got hold of the Gauntlet and brought you all back. Thanos won, but only briefly. That’s all we can really explain. We have to wait for the others to return. In the meantime, we may have to deal with the fallout of people disappearing and then suddenly appearing again.”

T’Challa nodded. “I’ll have my people look into it.”

Sam rubbed his head with the back of his hand. “Just strange to think we died.”

“At least there was a way to bring you back,” replied Bruce. “It could have been so much worse.”

Steve, listening in on the conversation, couldn’t agree more.

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SPACE

The next time he woke, he didn't fall unconscious. The light remained, though his vision remained fuzzy.

"Tony?" Pepper's voice broke through the haziness circulating his mind. "Are you with us?"

His lips felt numb. "I... I think so?" He didn't feel too sure on his answer. "What... what happened?" His left arm still dully ached.

"You stopped Thanos. Brought everyone back," a new voice answered.

Tony moved his head fractionally and saw the wizard, Doctor Strange standing beside his bed. "With what?"

"You don't remember?" asked Pepper, concern floating in her voice.

Tony winced. "Head is queasy."

"You recklessly cut off Thanos' left arm," said Strange. "I wasn't there but this was a variation of the future I had seen. You then used the Gauntlet to reverse the Snap, bringing those of us that died back."

"And Thanos?"

"He's dead," said Pepper. "Nebula killed him."

"Nebula?" Tony felt confused. "Was... was she that... blue, robot lady?"

"She was." Pepper reached forward and stroked Tony's hair. "But there were consequences in you using the Gauntlet."

Tony felt a sudden urge of dread in the pit of his stomach.

"Your left arm," she continued quietly, looking sad. "The raw power of the Gauntlet..." she hesitated.

Tony didn't want to look but the dull ache was still there.

"Your left arm is..." Tears fell from her eyes and Tony knew it was bad.

"Is what?" He didn't want to look.

"It's ruined. Burnt. The power of the Gauntlet..." she sobbed.

Slowly Tony looked down at his left arm. He felt sick. His arm was black and burned. When he tried to move it, he couldn't. His right arm had been removed and his left rendered useless. "Oh god..."

"I'm sorry." Strange seemed apologetic. "If Thanos had not taken you on Titan, you would have only lost your left arm only. This was always a strong possibility to happen."

Tony didn't know what to say. The fact that he'd lost both his limbs was devastating. He didn't want to face it, nor the consequences of it. Maybe if he ignored it... "Is... is there anything that can be done?" There had to be, right? "You've got magic! Can't you grow me another arm?"

"Magic doesn't work like that," stated Strange. "If I could help you, I would."

"Damn it..." muttered Tony. He was desperate. He didn't want to be without his arms. How could he create without them? His mind may be brilliant but his arms and hands were just as important to his creations as his mind was.

"Tony," said Pepper, "there may be a solution to helping you."

"What is it? I'll try anything." He still didn't want to keep seeing his burnt arm.

"Remember Helen Cho?" queried Pepper.

"Yeah. She still works for the Avengers. Haven't seen her in a while though." Was this the idea? Would it be feasible? Would it work? "The Cradle? It's destroyed when Vision was born."

"I know, but she's been creating a new one."

"Her work cannot regrow limbs," protested Tony. "It's just tissue."

"No, but Extremis can," said Pepper. "She's been experimenting, combining the two, making it far more stable and useful than the version Maya created. If you are willing, we can try it. It could give you your arm back. Do you want to?"

There was no hesitation in his answer. He needed his arms and if there was a way to restore them...

"Yes," he said. "I want to try."

**To be continued...**

## Chapter End Notes

Tony is, perhaps, temporarily armless... Oops?

The last chapter will be posted on Wednesday!

Until then,

the-writer1988

# A New Beginning

## Chapter Summary

It's the end of the story...

## Chapter Notes

I wanted to finish this before Endgame released and I have! I hope people like the ending to this fic!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

## AVENGERS COMPOUND

They didn't return to Wakanda. Instead they requested for the Guardians to drop them off at the Avengers Compound in up-state New York where Helen Cho was based. It was here that Rhodey decided to remain with Tony and Pepper. Strange departed too, using a portal to return to the Inner Sanctum, but not before dropping Peter Parker off at his Aunt's home.

The boy only went at Tony's insistence and the promise he would visit him when he was better.

Thor and Natasha returned to Wakanda with the Guardians. The Guardians, having stopped at Vormir on their way back to Earth to resurrect Gamora, did not intend to stay too long.

Tony fully expected not to see them again though they wished him well, even the one named Gamora who had been killed. He didn't know how they had brought her back but she'd been put in a medically induced coma once she had been brought on-board. He figured it had something to do with the Soul Stone being returned to Vormir. Since Tony had, had his own injuries to think about he hadn't really noticed her. However, the enhanced healing available to the Guardians had ensured Gamora's recovery.

Tony lay on the examination table in Helen's lab. He felt a bit sick, nervous about what was going to happen.

"This may not work, Mr. Stark," she said nervously. "The clinical trials haven't even started yet. I believe the theory is accurate..."

"I don't care," he replied. "I can be your test subject."

"I'm not sure I..."

He didn't let her finish. "Look, someone is going to be a test subject. If this new drug doesn't work on me then I wouldn't want it being tested on other people."

Helen was silent, but she still looked concerned. "Extremis is still volatile, even combined with my Cradle technology. Even your own work on it, though has helped me develop this, could still cause problems when combined with a different form of chemicals."

"I'm willing to take the risk," he stated again. "If not, I'll just use Extremis. At least that has been proven to grow back limbs, even though the effects if your body does not accept it, are highly explosive. Your tech and Extremis reduces the volatile aspect of the formula. I won't have any superpowers after it if this works."

"You are really determined, aren't you, Mr. Stark?" she asked. "I don't want to be the person who kills Tony Stark."

Pepper spoke up then from beside Tony. "Helen, I can personally guarantee you, if something happens to Tony, you will not be held responsible for it. Your name will be protected from the media at all costs. This is my idea too. I want you to help Tony, any way you can. His lost both arms in the space of two days."

Helen sighed, her features softening. "What arm do you want me to start with?"

Tony considered it. "The right. We can remove the metal arm he gave me. If this doesn't work, it can always be reinstalled again. The left is as good as dead anyway. May as well try this on the arm which is already gone."

"Then, we shall proceed," said Helen.

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Tony was put to sleep to have the metallic arm removed after it was established the arm itself had been grafted into his shoulder and required more work to remove than they had initially thought. A highly skilled team of surgeons were called in and signed confidentiality agreements before they learned their patient was Tony Stark. If any leak of Tony's condition reached the media, Stark Industries would destroy them.

After the operation, and once Tony was awake, Helen began by injecting a dose of her new chemical formula whilst Tony lay in the newly constructed Cradle she'd made.

He was surprised the process wasn't painful though there was a slight tingling at the junction of his shoulder. They saw the first results begin to emerge after a few hours. There was slight growth of the bone starting to form, alongside skin and muscle. Feeling a bit freaked out by the motion of seeing his arm regrow back, Tony had requested to be put to sleep for the duration of it.

When he did next wake, which was a full seventy-two hours later, Tony was pleased to see he had one full, human arm again. He hoped the same procedure could be repeated with his left arm, though since he'd received the injection of Helen's formula, it had started to do



something with his left arm, even giving him some of the movement back but not reducing the blackened and burnt look of it.

“What are you going to do about your left?” asked Pepper a few days later.

Moving his new, flesh-grown right arm was a joy. “I’m getting more movement back in it. Whatever is in Helen’s formula has made a difference.” He held up the blackened hand.

“I’m not sure I am happy with it though. Do I just have this one removed and then a new one grown again? Or do I keep this? The movement and strength is coming back... and if I really wanted to, I think I could be Iron Man again, especially if I keep working on these exercises.”

The daily physio Tony did daily was helping a lot.

“Iron Man?” she whispered quietly.

“I’m not going to though,” added Tony.

Pepper quipped her head to the side. “What do you mean?”

“As soon as I can, I will be making an official statement to the media announcing my intention of standing down as Iron Man. I will fully retire from the Avengers for good. I’ve done all I can. The world is in safe hands with the other superheroes around. Peter, Strange... heck, even Rhodey! He intends to stay on, I think, but the path I’ve been walking on for the last decade has always led me towards one thing.”

“And what’s that?”

He smiled. “You. Always you.”

And he leaned forward to kiss her deeply on her lips.

“As soon as I can, I fully intend to make you Mrs. Stark. As of now, Tony Stark is a family man, not a superhero.”

- - - - -

It didn’t surprise Tony in the slightest when he received notice that Steve Rogers wanted to talk to him. Since the Wakandan battle, the arrest warrants for the fugitive Avengers had been suspended, allowing them to return to the United States, pending an investigation into their actions during the so-called Civil War. They had been limited to the Avengers Compound, something the rogue Avengers had reluctantly accepted. It had been the conditions Rhodey had given them if Steve wanted to talk to Tony.

And because Steve had wanted to talk to Tony he had agreed to those terms and his team had followed him.

It had taken another week after Roger’s return for him to seek out Tony.

He had been relaxing in his Private Lounge in the Compound when Tony was alerted to Roger’s arrival. Reluctantly, Tony had let him in and now they sat facing one another, an

uncomfortable silence falling between them.

Tony wasn't going to budge. He wouldn't speak first which was what Steve clearly wanted. He kept looking away from him. The last time they had seen one another properly before the whole furor with Thanos was Siberia. The memories were still fresh.

"Tony..." said Steve quietly. "I think I made a mistake."

That surprised Tony. "About what?"

"I should have told you about your parents. I know I said this in the letter I sent but I wanted to tell you in person. I'm sorry I kept it from you. I shouldn't have done. It was selfish of me to do so."

Tony's lips twitched. "I'm sorry for trying to kill Barnes." Because he was. The video had caused him emotional distress and he hadn't been able to control himself. Who would have been able to in those circumstances? "I lived for twenty years believing they had died because my father had drunk at the wheel. If I'd known it was murder... Barnes wasn't responsible for his actions then. I know that now but when you are faced with truth of that magnitude and the person who killed them is in the room with you..." He swallowed. "You lose all sense of control."

"I shouldn't have fought you," replied Steve. "I should have tried to talk you down. I should have done the right thing in telling you when I found out."

"It's done now," said Tony.

Steve nodded. "I wanted to say... I'm sorry for letting Thanos keep you. For what he did to you."

"Not your fault," whispered Tony. "I told you to let him take me. I couldn't let him have the stone. Strange gave him the Time Stone in order to spare my life. I didn't want to have two stones on my conscience. Still, what matters is this is over now. We won."

"No. You won, Tony." Steve lifted his chin. "The others told me what happened. What you did. And the sacrifice you made. People live because of you. Thank you."

Tony wasn't sure what to think. "I did what was necessary."

"You're not the man I thought you were. I misjudged you..." admitted Steve. "Several times now you've sacrificed yourself for the team. You were prepared to die and I never acknowledged it. I've always thought I was the heart of the Avenger's team. But... I was wrong."

Was Roger's saying what he thought he was?

"The team was better off with you a part of it. Without you, we weren't... a team. There was always a piece missing and it was the place you filled. Tony... I know what happened between us is probably irreparable. But I hope we can still be civil with one another in the future of our working relationship," explained Steve.

“We won’t be working together,” replied Tony quietly. “I’m resigning for good from the Avengers. Iron Man is retiring.”

“What? Why?” Steve was surprised.

Tony sighed. “Pepper. I love her. I want to be with her. And being Iron Man is getting in the way of what we both want. Besides, I’ve lost two arms, though one has been grown back, and I’m old and too old for these superhero heroics. Besides, how many new people have emerged since we first formed? Enough now that a new team can be assembled. The Avengers do not need me.”

“There’s nothing I can say to bring you back?” asked Steve.

Shaking his head, Tony said no. “I’ll still have the suit but it will be used in emergencies only and as a last resort. After what has happened the last few weeks, I don’t think I can do this anymore.”

“Then the Avengers will not be the same without you, Tony. I think if I had not kept your parent’s murder from you, we would have stood against Thanos and won before he could even kill half the universe.”

Tony slightly smirked. “You’re saying this to get on my good side, aren’t you?”

“No!” Steve looked shocked. “I undervalued you and I shouldn’t have done. If I’d opened my eyes and seen you as the hero you really are, none of this would have happened.”

“Maybe... maybe not,” admitted Tony. “It happened. All we can do is deal with it.”

Steve stood from his seat and walked forward. “Can we at least part as associates even if we were never truly friends?”

Tony glanced at Steve’s extended hand. There was a lot of history between them but perhaps there was a chance it could be salvaged. Retiring from the Avengers didn’t mean cutting out all the people he had met from his life. If they wanted him there, wanted to still know him, why shouldn’t he? Tony stood up. “How about this? We start over? As friends.”

Steve looked astounded. “A new beginning.”

They shook hands.

- - - - -

A few months later, away from the public eye, Tony married Pepper. The ceremony was kept to only a few people. Pepper’s family and on Tony’s side, Happy and Rhodey, along with the original five Avengers.

It was a small, dignified wedding; one that Pepper had wanted.

Tony, standing in his tuxedo, holding Pepper’s hand as she said her vows, could only reflect upon the path that had been brought them to this place and time.

The last eleven years had been a story of redemption, of finding his true place in the world, but right now, all he wanted was the woman in front of him. Her red hair spilled around her shoulders and her lips were as red as they could be.

Taking her into his arms as they were proclaimed husband and wife, kissing her passionately on the lips, Tony knew where his future was. It wasn't being a superhero, it was being a husband, a lover, a friend and, hopefully, a father.

His story may have ended but his future had only just begun.

**THE END**

### Chapter End Notes

I wanted to wrap up Tony and Steve in a way that means they can at least get along with one another. And Steve has had his eyes opened about Tony too...

I want to say a BIG THANK YOU to everyone who has supported this story. It has been incredible to read your responses and thank you for following me on this journey!

It has been a real pleasure,

the-writer1988

## End Notes

Please let me know what you think!

Tony wouldn't want Vision to sacrifice himself for him. I think Steve made the right choice. But Thanos is not finished with Tony or the Avengers yet.

More soon.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!