

The newcomers did not hesitate for a moment once Dreykov finished shouting his orders. The one with the skull motif on their helmet, Taskmaster, started running around the room, attempting to circumnavigate me and leave the fighting to their compatriots. The large man and the younger man with visibly augmented legs both charged me at once. Even before they reached me though, the woman reached her hands out, shooting out red and purple energy that wrapped around my arms, holding me steady.

The proto-plan forming in my head was to wait for them to come to me before slamming them into the ground, taking them roughly out of the fight. I needed to knock them unconscious hard enough that whatever was jolting them awake was ineffective. I needed them out long enough to push out my cabinet of tricks, get some kind of anti-mind control jewelry, and put it on them.

Instead, my danger sense screamed at me in a way I hadn't experienced since the Chitauri mother ship had almost evaporated me with its energy cannon. I tore myself free of the strange energy controller and jumped back, flipping over Taskmaster and Dreykov, deploying my shield and holding it up defensively. My heart rate was skyrocketing, my danger sense still pulsing out steadily.

But nothing happened.

Before I could look around for the source of the warning, the young man with enhancement-encased legs ran at me, moving at a speed that honestly shocked me. I was certain I could move faster, at least in short spurts, but the fact that he could run this fast without my assistance was startling.

He slammed his hand into my shield, the dull metallic reverberation telling me that he had, in fact, been enhanced more than I could see, as that strike should have absolutely shattered his hand at the speed he was moving. I pulled my shield to the side, swinging out a kick to hopefully shatter his knee-

And my danger sense screamed again. This time the source was the much larger man charging me. His enhancement looked painful but clearly worked as he moved faster than Steve could have to smash me in the face with his shield.

I ducked out of the way, using the momentum to spin and put some distance between us. I used the time to deploy my secondary arms, quickly turning them into their weapon form and blasting at Taskmaster, who was attempting to remove the chains from Dreykov's arms. The first blast caught them in the side, their armor charring and smoking, but failed to make it completely through. Even as the second and third blasts whizzed past them, the red and purple energy the enhanced woman was controlling wrapped around me, throwing my aim off.

I yanked myself free and blasted at Taskmaster again, who dodged and spun, managing to avoid all of my shots. They pulled out their glowing pistols and opened fire, whining blasts of purple-blue energy fired out at an impressive speed.

My danger sense, which had yet to stop sending out low-level signs of danger since the beginning of this fight, shrieked at me to move, to run out of the way. Instead, I raised my shield to block them, only for the sense to double down as the largest of the enhanced agents caught up with me.

He bashed his shield off the side of my head, hard enough to deform whatever metal it was made out of. A follow-up strike from the other enhanced man smashed into my side, a full high kick that sparked off my armor. My instincts screamed to try and protect myself, so I pulled my shield to the side, only for Taskmaster to pepper my chest and head with blasts from her energy pistols.

By now, my sorcerous protection was barely a third of the way depleted. But despite how little damage they were doing, my danger sense would not stop pounding into my head. It was so distracting that I didn't see the sparking and a slightly balled-up minigun until it smashed into my side. It was glowing red and purple as the psychic-enhanced soldier pummeled me with it. It shoved me back until my feet hit the wall.

With a shout, I retracted my shield, reached out, and grabbed it, managing to push through the instincts and constant barrage of warning that my danger sense was pumping through me. I tore the destroyed weapon from her psychic grip and threw it at Taskmaster, desperately trying to keep them and Dreykov from escaping. The crumbling weapon smashed into the armored fighter and knocked them off their feet, sending them tumbling across the floor. Dreykov immediately shouted at them, even as they struggled to get up.

I was buffeted by strikes from all three of the still-standing enhanced fighters, struggling to push through my danger senses constant barrage of overstimulation and paranoid reactions. Whenever I moved to attack or tried to push through and counterattack, my connection to the extra sense would light up like a Christmas tree. It was like fighting the instinct that prevented you from hurting yourself, but multiple times more intense.

As Taskmaster stood and made their way back to Dreykov, most of their external enhancements broken and sparking, I realized I needed to take drastic action. They couldn't hurt me, but eventually, Dreykov would get away if I couldn't do anything without fighting against myself and my danger sense. I pushed out my wings and flew into the air, flying around in a circle to keep the psychic bitch from grabbing me. I dismissed my armor from around my left arm, halfway up my bicep, before pulling out my knife and cutting it off in one easy slice.

I screamed, gritted my teeth, and cursed, even as my healing amulet started to regrow my arm. The danger sense disappeared completely, having amputated the limb it had been

tattooed on. As my limb fell away, I could feel the gap in my mind the sense had left, but it quickly faded as I landed. I summoned my armor back as my arm finished re-growing, standing completely still as the large enhanced man charged and punched me across the jaw. There was no overwhelming urge to dodge, block, or anything beyond the dull thud as he hit me. His fist deformed around my jaw, broken severely even with his enhancements.

I would have laughed at his expression, looking down at his broken hand in confusion, if this situation hadn't drained me of any humor I had. I struck out with my fist, shattering his shoulder, grabbing his other arm and spinning in a quarter turn, throwing him at the quick-footed enhanced, hard enough to dislocate his unbroken shoulder.

By now, Taskmaster was slowly helping Dreykov limp out of the room. I turned, pushed one of my revolvers into my hand, and fired six shots, ignoring that I was leaving myself open to attack while I did. The first two blew Dreykov's legs off at the knee, the large man pulling the already injured Taskmaster to the ground. The following four shots took off one of Taskmaster's hands and pummeled their legs. I turned to the side and aimed my gun at the two male enhanced, but the female psychic screamed and wrapped her energy around my whole body, the red and purple energy much denser than I had seen her use so far. I pushed out my other revolver, tearing through her grip, and blasted her instead, blowing off her arm.

She dropped, screaming and clutching her stump, her energy flickering before disappearing completely, allowing me to easily turn to the remaining threats. The fast one was already screaming and charging me, his legs moving in a blur, his fist raised to deliver an enhanced punch. I dropped my pistol, caught his arm, and twisted through his momentum, the sound of splintering bone and rending metal coming from his arm before he tumbled past me. I shot his right leg off as he started to recover, blasting it three times to do so.

The last threat, the large enhanced man, bashed his shield against me from behind, actually forcing me to stumble forward to stay standing. I turned to find him looking at his shield in confusion, which was dented even more now. I leaped forward, unwilling to wait for him to come to me, and slugged him in the jaw, which crunched as I hit him. I followed it up with a disabling kick to his knee, bending it backward before shoving him hard enough to slam him into one of the cell doors, which bent back under the impact.

I stopped, looking at the carnage around me, taking a deep breath, and letting it out. I quickly pushed out a trunk, followed by four more, finishing it with the specially painted caduceus droid trunk. As battle bots and healers started pouring out, I pointed towards the door Natasha and I had entered from.

"I want this entire prison locked down. Nonlethal takedowns only, I don't know who is here willingly," I ordered, the robotic troops jogging away immediately, a few of them turning to go head through the doorway Natasha had left through earlier. "Caduceas squad, filter through the building and heal any injuries. I want four of you to stabilize these people. Remove what's

keeping them awake and then knock them out. Keep them unconscious, remove all foreign enhancements, and *do not give that fucker his legs back.*”

The doctor bots rushed to follow my orders, and I could already hear the fighting from above, filtering down the stairs. I resisted the urge to leave immediately, knowing that this needed attention now before it spiraled even further out of control.

I pulled out my phone and called Nick Fury. It only rang once before he picked up.

“Maker, what do you want?” He asked bluntly. “We haven’t-”

“Sorry, Fury, but whatever it is, it’s not important right now,” I said, looking around the destroyed, bloody room. “We have a situation, one that Shield needs to take the reigns on. How quickly can you get the helicarrier to the Seventh Circle Prison in Russia?”

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After a long silence, followed by a chain of cursing that would make a sailor blush, Fury had Shield assets on site within the hour, though it was just the “local” branch. They were not happy that I had essentially invaded Russian territory, but clearly, Fury had some choice words for them about me because they basically left me alone. The man himself wouldn’t be arriving until early the next morning, so I was not going to be hanging around to wait for him.

Once the team had made their way through the prison and confirmed everyone had been locked down, I ordered half of the battle bots back into storage. I left all of the caduceus droids deployed to monitor everyone and keep them unconscious until Shield could properly take control of the facility. I left the rest of the battle bots under orders to listen to Fury unless it was to kill anyone or if it would take them away from the prison.

Ignoring the Shield agents, I started with what I needed to get done. First, I scanned all of the once-enhanced soldiers that Dreykov threw at me and the enhancements that the caduceus droids had removed. I was shocked at just how much metal and Chitauri tech had been in each of them. Even the weird psychic woman had had a shocking amount of metal in her head, which was now in a small pile next to her.

The scan I did on the largest pawn had revealed him to be Alexei Shostakov, the man Natasha had claimed was a father figure to her. While I wasn’t sure how much of her story had been true, I still made sure he was okay. I took blood and hair samples from each of the once-enhanced soldiers, as well as any other people who scanned as being under the control of the Red Room or as willing members. About half of the prison staff worked for them in some capacity, while all of the women that had been helping before Ema had left with Natasha had been under Dreykov’s control.

I combined all of the samples and whipped up a Red Room tracker, which thankfully showed very few people spread across the globe. The Russian government was the most heavily affected, with some agents dotted across the planet. The scanner even had two different colored dots for people being mind-controlled and who were willing participants.

I also learned that Taskmaster was Antonia Dreykov, General Dreykov's daughter. She had been seriously injured by some sort of attack, and apparently had the ability to mimic the fighting styles and movements of people on sight. Or at least she did have that ability, as the caduceus droids had taken my words seriously, healing her completely and removing the implants that let her mimic people.

The last thing I did was try and cure everyone of their mind control. Learning from my recent creation of the calming laser, I combined a few bits of anti-mind control jewelry with a laser pointer. I then added extra magic, worked in two divine essence crystals, and used them on Antonia first, as her scan explained that she had been under her father's full control for *years*.

It worked, thankfully, though it took a few seconds of constant application to work through the entire brain. Dreykov's mind control method was an almost complete takeover of the pre-frontal cortex, but it left the rest of the brain almost completely unaffected. It was so precise and potent that it made me think that whatever the fuck he was using to set the control in the first place was not simple hypnosis or brainwashing through torture, like what Bucky went through.

I removed the brainwashing on the remaining people, before having a caduceus droid guide me around the facility to everyone else who was under the Red Rooms' control, freeing them as well. I then texted Fury and told him that I would get him a batch of the trackers and the anti-mind control lasers. He called and demanded that I stay put so I could be debriefed.

I told him to fuck off and traveled home, carding my phone so I wouldn't have to listen to it ring.

I made my way to the emergency healing bed, which was in a small room in my apartment, my armor flaking away as I walked. Ema was floating around, her exosuit in its cube form nearby, a sizable chunk missing from it. A caduceus droid was also there, both of them keeping an eye on Natasha.

"How is she?" I asked, kneeling beside the bed, and taking her hand.

"Natasha Romanoff is in good health, though still under the influence of mind control," The droid answered before Ema could.

I nodded and used the laser pointer on her, scanning her the entire time. When Dreykov's influence was finally gone, I let out a long breath, giving Natasha's hand a squeeze. After a long few moments, I looked over to Ema.

"Thank you for listening and taking her away instead of staying to help," I said, my partner bobbing out the equivalent of a nod.

"Once you had your armor, I knew you would be okay," She explained. "Though it took longer than I expected."

"How bad was the damage?"

"Bad. Nothing happened to her brain, but... he had to remove her eye and modify her skull to fit the bomb under her mask," Ema explained, her anger coming through. "I hope you kicked that fuckers ass."

"Blew off both his legs," I responded with a shrug, looking back to Natasha. "Should have just gone for the head."

"Don't think too much about it, Carson," Ema said, floating down over Natasha. "You stopped him, Natasha is safe, and now that we know it's a problem we can help Shield get rid of the Red Room completely."

I nodded and slowly stood.

"Where are you going?" Ema asked, floating over to follow me.

"I've got work to do," I said, leaving the room, Ema hot on my heels.

"Carson Walsh, so help me god, I will make you regret it if your next step isn't toward your bedroom!" She said once we were out of the room.

I stopped, my shoulders sinking before I kept walking towards the warehouse.

"Not yet Ema, maybe in a few hours."