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Issue #23

"THE RULER AND HIS WIZARD"

Part 1

by Brent Lambert

The room is empty and without any type of light in its dimensions. In the center of the darkness is a being of incredible power. The Kree looking being has the ability to create everything from planets to other dimensions. In fact he created the dimension from which the Mutant Forger came from. This man's name was Supreme Evolutionary and he was where he was in this dark room so he could discuss business. Someone had something to offer him and Supreme Evolutionary never turned down a gift.

"I'm glad to see you're prompt," Numinus said as she appeared in a flash of light. Supreme Evolutionary hated the pleasant smile on her face. It made him very wary of the cosmic being.

"I'm always on time guiding spirit. So I see you managed to get Fusion in the midst of the Avengers," Supreme Evolutionary said attempting to make some small talk before he got down to business. Besides small talk always revealed plenty of information. People tended to spill things out unintentionally all the time.

Numinus smirked, "Yes I did though it took some work on my part. I had to make sure the Children of the Dark arrived on Earth and then I had to go subconsciously inform Krugarr of the Children of the Dark's arrival."

Supreme Evolutionary sighed out of annoyance, "And you had to gather Fusion and the others to keep the Avengers from fighting the Children of the Dark at full force. Yes I already know all of this Numinus."

"And what of you Evolutionary? How go your plans? Have they even come into full-force yet?" Numinus inquired with a clipped tone in response to Supreme Evolutionary's annoyance. She didn't appreciate his tone with her. He was relatively new to the game of cosmic dealings and yet he treated her as she were some whelp to be shooed off at a moment's whim.

"Deathbird and I have yet to find the Celestial Ring, but the relationship between Exodus and Crystal is progressing nicely," Supreme Evolutionary informed in a much calmer tone than before. He wasn't going to get anything from Numinus if he kept being a jerk. She was an Abstract and they easily got angry. They were above most beings so they are always uptight.

"Why not just pull Exodus into the web of the Avenger some other way? Fooling

him into a relationship could have bad results."

Supreme Evolutionary held up his right hand where four rings glistened, "These are the Mankal Rings. One of the rings is Love. With that ring I turned any and all love Crystal had for Quicksilver onto Exodus. And with Bennet I just used the love he had for his family. So the love between the two is very much true. I could tell them I used the Mankal Ring to create their feelings for each other and it wouldn't make a bit of difference. The feelings wouldn't fade."

"Good to hear. Now I've got some information for you. The Celestial Ring is located in the Temple of Paum in the Tun Galaxy. Beware though. A few perils are there to test you," Numinus said finally as she vanished in a flare of pink radiance.

"One has to wonder if she wants us to succeed," Deathbird said as she walked through the door after Numinus was gone.

"Of course she doesn't want us to succeed, but we will anyway. The Celestial Guard will be gathered and the Celestial Messiah will lead them. The fate of the universe will depend on it."

"So should I prep us for a trip to the Temple of Paum?"

"Of course my Shi'ar beauty," Supreme Evolutionary smiled.

Avengers Mansion

Wanda Maximoff was the leader of the Avengers this day. Thor was off on a visit to Asgard, Crystal was spending time with Luna, and Sersi was in Brazil doing some humanitarian work. So Wanda called in Callisto and Gilgamesh to keep the roster at a reasonable size.

At this very moment she was talking to Fusion, the newest member of the Avengers. Unlike Thor she wanted to find out as much as she could about Fusion. It didn't sit well with her that someone could just come out of the blue and join the Avengers. Thor's good-nature and trusting ways could be an asset, but when it came to setting up a team roster Thor would be better off leaving the task to someone else.

"So, just for the record here, what exactly are your powers?"

Fusion laughed and jokingly said, "Just about everything. Seriously though, I possess the abilities of every super powered being that has ever existed up until

my time."

"And just exactly what time are you from?"

Fusion squiggled a little in his chair at this question, "I can't remember exactly and neither could Gaunt. The only people I can think of who might know are Lila Storm and the Energy Corsairs. They're from my time."

Scarlet Witch nodded, "Okay how confident are you in using your powers?"

"Very confident, but there is something I should probably inform you about," Fusion said. His face suddenly became twisted with worry. Scarlet Witch saw this change in facial expression and her fears were confirmed. Wanda knew this Fusion was too good to be true.

"So what's the problem?" Scarlet Witch asked concerned. She was dreading Fusion's answer.

"My powers are beginning to break down. See when I was created a mechanism was put inside of me. If I was ever gone for a long period of time this mechanism would come into place. The mechanism would make it so I could access only one power safely. If I take more than one power upon myself it would tax my very being and threaten to kill me. That mechanism is coming into effect," Fusion explained.

Scarlet Witch leaned back in her chair and bit down on her pen, "This could be a problem."

"If you don't think me fit to be on the Avengers I'll leave," Fusion said.

"No, it's not that at all Fusion. We'll just have to work through this is all," Scarlet Witch said.

His real name was Flavius Scollio, but he preferred to be called Emperor.

Scollio was a soldier in a distant outpost of the Roman emperor Caligula. Caligula sent them to investigate a falling star in Africa, which turned out to be a crashed starship. It was something that none of Scollio's troop could comprehend. To come across a starship in the days of the Roman Empire would have been like a primate seeing a bunch of cars charging at him.

All other members of his troop were instantly slain by energy released from the ship's single occupant. Scollio, however, had hidden and ambushed the alien, killing it with a swift jab of his sword. It was indeed the move a coward would

make, but he survived and that's all that counted in the end. Being a coward that day is what led to his glorious future and now promising present.

Flavius quickly realized he had discovered a weapon of great power, which could give him dominion over the Roman Empire itself; Scollio donned the alien's robes and amulet.

When he tried on the helmet, his mind was set bombarded with images and thoughts beyond any human comprehension at that time. It is unknown whether he was rendered unconscious for hours, days, centuries, or even millennia. When he recovered though, he used his new power to raise a tower as his kingdom.

He captured and controlled the natives of a nearby tribe to serve as his subjects, then recreated a new Rome. He took a new name Gaius Tiberius Augustus Agrippa from the three greatest emperors of Rome, as well as its greatest general. Flavius was now infused with power and he felt he should have a name worthy of his newfound power.

When the race of Inhumans moved their city of Attilan to the moon, the energy used in the moving drew the attention of the government organization SHIELD. In following the movement of the energy blip, they encountered an even more powerful source of energy, Scollio and his armor, on the border of Wakanda. Not having any authority in the African nation, SHIELD leader Nick Fury requested that the Fantastic Four investigate the energy source. The Fantastic Four, along with Frankie Raye, at that time known as the Human Torch, traveled to Wakanda where an undercover Black Panther, in investigating the Black Tower, joined them.

The Fantastic Four allowed Scollio's soldiers to capture them and bring them to the Tower, confident that they could escape after they had learned what they needed. That had been a great folly on the part of the Fantastic Four and their allies. They were far too arrogant that day and for a time it did cost them. Scollio using his armor quickly stripped them of their powers and rendered them unconscious. It was a humbling moment for the Fantastic Four and a glorious one for Emperor.

Emperor explained his origins to Sue Richards, the Invisible Girl, as well as his plans to make her his bride. He found her to be quite the attractive lady, but unfortunately she refused him. To make her pay he had Thing and Human Torch face off against one another in gladiator combat. He would have them fight to the death until Sue submitted to him.

Sue believing his helmet to be the source of his power ripped it from his head. Once she ripped the helmet away there was only an empty suit of armor after the energy escaped from it.

All of Scollio's changes fell apart with his supposed destruction. His subjects rapidly aged and died, the Fantastic Four regained their powers and wills, and the entire city of New Rome and everything it was destroyed in a powerful explosion. All except the armor of Emperor that is.

The armor survived, as did Scollio. His body had become one with the armor and so when Sue separated his helmet from the rest of the armor his body retreated back into the armor. There the armor laid dormant in Africa for many years until a young teenage boy and his group of friends discovered the armor. One of the boys playfully put on the armor and Emperor was freed. The boy's essence was replaced with that of Flavius instantly. Emperor had returned that day.

He was about to seek out the Fantastic Four and make them pay for their grievance against him when a powerful wizard named Calizuma approached him. The magician had made him an offer he couldn't refuse. That's why Flavius was here today floating over the house of a young girl by the name of Holly-Ann Ember.

Looking down upon the suburban house Emperor reached out with his mind and ripped the entire roof away like it was a tumbling piece of paper being blown along by the wind. The red roof collided with the side of Holly-Ann's neighbors. Scollio didn't even pay attention to the screams of the Ember family as he descended from the sky right into their living room.

Little Holly-Ann had her arms wrapped tightly around her mother. Terror flooded her eyes at the sight of the golden armored man. Holly-Ann had met some superheroes before, but none of them had destroyed her home. Far from the contrary they had helped her with her powers.

"What do you want?" Holly-Ann mumbled out through tears, snot, and a trembling voice.

Smiling wickedly Flavius stretched out his hand and Holly-Ann was violently ripped from her mother's waist. The little girl's father and mother tried to reach out for their daughter, but they were both instantly slammed back into their seats with a powerful mind blast.

"Sleep and remember nothing," Emperor said coolly as Holly-Ann's parents closed their eyes and slept.

Avengers Mansion

Scarlet Witch was leaning back in her chair drinking a cup of cappuccino when Callisto came knocking on her door. Wanda sighed, took another sip of her drink,

and said, "Come in."

The former Morlock walked into the room with a distressed look on her face, "Venture Ridge, Wyoming has been attacked."

Wanda swiveled around in her chair, "Who did the attacking?"

Callisto shook her head, "I don't know, but a little girl was kidnapped. Her name is Holly-Ann Ember."

Leaning back in her chair and biting on her finger Wanda said, "Why does that name sound familiar?"

"Probably because it is familiar. I did a check on the Avengers files and found Holly-Ann Ember's name on there. Whoever kidnapped her had good reason. She is pretty much a female Franklin Richards except she can't consciously tap into her power yet," Callisto explained.

Wanda stood up and put down her unfinished cappuccino. Sternly she told Cal, "Tell everyone suit up and meet me in the hangar. We're going to Wyoming."

"Alright," Callisto said as she walked out of Wanda's room and closed the door behind her.

"I get the feeling this is going to get rough," Scarlet Witch said to no one in particular.

Arctic Circle

Calizuma walked down the few steps leading into the dank chamber and smiled. He was a Tibetan man wearing a white tuxedo and he had on a big white hat. Two white feathers tipped themselves out from the hat and the wizard was wearing white tinted sunglasses. Only a few yards away from him was his prize. It was the reason he had come all the way to the Arctic Circle. He was here for the Eternity Man.

The Eternity Man was once known as Jason Beere, a wealthy industrialist who had been a fierce competitor of Tony Stark. One day he was diagnosed with a terminal illness and given six months to live. Jason became angered over the fact that his vast wealth couldn't save him. After that he slipped into madness and decided that if he had to die the world would come with him.

Beere used a portion of his money to have a powerful neutron bomb placed in his chest. He also had a suit of armor built for himself. He attacked the Avengers and

tried to make them kill him and in turn set the bomb off. Iron Man subdued him though. Beere threatened that the world would die when he did and he was not lying. When Jason's heart stopped beating then all the world would come with him. To prevent this Iron Man locked Jason in a cryogenic chamber where his heart would be slowed, but it would never stop. Beere gained the ironic name of Eternity Man that day. He had feared dying young, but now he was forced to live forever.

"At least until I came along," Calizuma smiled as he walked over to the cryogenic chamber where the Eternity Man was stored. Iron Man had hid him in the Arctic Circle in the hopes that no one would ever try to find him. Tony had obviously grown complacent over time in guarding Beere. Calizuma had honestly expected some more resistance from Stark.

Venture Ridge, Wyoming

"We're not making any progress here," Callisto complained as she shuffled her way through the wreckage. She was a Morlock and a hunter. Scavenging for clues was not her way, but she was now also an Avengers. She had to always remember that. Callisto had discovered a new aspect of herself and staying with the Avengers would help her keep in touch with that new aspect.

Quoi flew over Callisto and said, "Hate to say it Wanda, but I gotta agree with Cal here. We really aren't finding anything that can point us to who kidnapped this little girl."

"Perhaps we aren't going to find anything. Let's pack up and-URKK!" Scarlet Witch cried out as red whip appeared out of the ground and wrapped itself around Wanda's body. The whip's touch knocked Wanda out on the spot.

"Everyone run!" Callisto yelled, but before she could even move a red whip reached up from the ground and knocked her out. The process repeated itself for Fusion, Gilgamesh, and the rest of the Avengers except for Quoi, who was in the air.

Looking down at his fallen comrades Quoi knew something he couldn't hope to handle was happening. He would have to get help. Taking one final glance at his fallen teammates he sped off back towards Avengers Mansion. He would have to dig up some help for the team.

As the Celestial Messiah flew away another man made his presence. In the arms of this man was a little girl whose eyes were glowing with red fire. This man was Emperor and with the power of Holly-Ann Embers he had just captured the Avengers. Emperor knew the Avengers would come here because he implanted

the idea to come here in Scarlet Witch's mind with his massive psychic powers. And with a little help from Holly-Ann he was able to take down Earth's Mightiest Heroes without too much trouble.

"Now if Calizuma got what we need then the real fireworks will start," Emperor grinned.

Issue #24

"THE RULER AND HIS WIZARD"

Part 2

by Brent Lambert

Quoi came out of the sky and landed gently on the freshly cut green grass of the mansion. As Quoi's feet touched the ground the grass pushed away like a field of corn would do if a helicopter were landing in it. Landing on the grass felt like stepping on a pillow to Quoi. Jarvis managed to keep the grass that well kept despite the many comings and goings of the Avengers. That was super-heroic in Quoi's mind at least.

As Quoi walked across the grass he felt like he was floating on clouds. Jarvis was to be commended for a job well done. Continuing his brisk walk across the mansion lawn Quoi picked up on the scent of a bushel of flowers spread neatly out across four rows in a flowerbed only a yard away. The flowers were an assortment of purple, red, and white.

Knocking on the mahogany door of the mansion Quoi was greeted by the face of the Avenger's faithful butler, Edwin Jarvis. Seeing the Celestial Messiah he exclaimed immediately, "Master Quoi! How good it is to see that you have returned. Come in quickly. I'm afraid we have pressing issues at hand. Please come in, sir."

"Tell me about it. We've got serious problems here! Very serious problems," Quoi said as he walked through the door and saw a colorful group of characters standing in the living room. One woman looked like she walked right out of a Tarzan movie. Another looked like he was big ball of magma given form. As can easily be guessed he wasn't sitting on any of the furniture. There was one amongst this crowd that Quoi was very familiar with. His mother had spoke of him often. He was the master of the Zero Fluid and his name was Jack-of-Hearts.

"I'm pleased to meet you Celestial Messiah. I only wish it was under better circumstances," Jack-of-Hearts greeted as he took Quoi's hand in a strong, firm handshake. Quoi had only felt a stronger grip from Thor. Of course he had yet to encounter the Hulk, Juggernaut, or Absorbing Man.

"Just call me Quoi! So what's this all about?" Quoi asked hoping to get some quick answers.

Jack looked back over his shoulder at the assemblage of super powers gathered in the Mansion. "We were all gathered by Apollo. He knew of the peril the Avengers were in and sent us to give you a hand. The sun god claimed to be a friend."

Though the Celestial Messiah knew of Jack-of-Hearts' great and noble exploits he was still suspicious. "Yes, Apollo is indeed a friend, but why would he send all of you? Why not just inform some other Avengers and have them help me?"

"I can see you're suspicious Sequoia, but we truly are here to help you save the Avengers. Apollo pulled us together because he wanted all the former and absent Avengers to be a second line of defense in case we fail," Jack-of-Hearts explained.

"I believe Mr. Hart's intentions Master Quoi," Jarvis said as he stood beside Jack-of-Hearts showing his support for the former lover of Ganymede and the wielder of the Zero Fluid.

Quoi folded his arms and smiled at the stern expressions on the two men's faces. "Alright you guys got me. Lets go save my teammates already!"

"I'm glad your opinion is so easily swayed in this instance Celestial Messiah. Lila, Curano, Moltarblast, and Phermona get ready. It's time for us to save some of Earth's Mightiest!"

Lila Storm stood up and dusted off her black pants. She was wearing a long sleeve pink jacket with a black 4 etched on her right sleeve. She had her hair pulled back and clinched together with a square pink hairpiece. "It's about time! I was starting to grow mold on my butt from waiting around so long! Sheesh! How long does it take for you guys to get it together?"

"Don't be so harsh on the men Lila! They can't help it their small minds take forever to do anything," Phermona mocked. Her powers allow her to woe and break the minds of men easily.

"This just isn't going to be easy is it?" Quoi asked with a deep sigh.

"I doubt anything ever goes easy with Phermona," Jack-of-Hearts whispered into the Celestial Messiah's ear. The last thing he wanted was for Phermona to hear him. The woman could easily bend him to her will like she could with most mother males. Her pheromones made sure of that.

Quoi turned back and asked everyone, "Do we all know what we're going up against here?"

Curano yawned uninterested, "Yeah some guy who has a girl who's like another little Franklin. Apollo already told us everything."

"It seems you ladies aren't taking this threat seriously here. I suggest you do and fast. Someone with the power of Franklin Richards is not something to be trifled with. Remember Onslaught?" Moltarblast asked in his gruff and muffled voice.

"Alright Moltar I'll stop being such a cranky trick about this. I just don't like being away from Brake is all," Lila said as she pushed a piece of loose hair out of her eyes.

"Who's Brake?" Quoi inquired. He had figured it was boyfriend. He found Lila to be attractive, but he wasn't interested in her. Phermona had a nice shape, but she seemed to be a little too dominating for Sequoia's tastes. Curano was a whole other matter altogether. She looked like she walked out of the movie Congo.

"Brake is my infant baby boy who I'm terribly worried about if you just have to know," Lila exasperated. She was rarely separated from her baby boy and whenever she was worry overtook her. The future descendent of Johnny Storm was barely able to hold herself together when she wasn't near Brake. Her fear of being away from her child wasn't just from maternal instinct. A past experience had scarred her deeply.

When she first gave birth to Brake his father stole him away. It took Lila and her many times great-cousin, Franklin Richards, six months to find Brake. Those months had been absolute agony for Lila. Ever since then she doesn't like leaving Brake in a place where she isn't near.

"If we don't get going here won't be anyone left to worry about!" Jack-of-Hearts exclaimed.

Outer Space

Emperor stared out of the window overlooking the planet. It was quite the dazzling view seeing the mixture of blues, browns, and greens. Soon though if all went according to plan those colors would be replaced with the colors of a new world and a new order. All of Emperor's and Calizuma's plan hinged on two people, Holly-Ann Ember and Eternity Man. Flavius had already snagged up the young Holly-Ann and now he was patiently waiting for the return of his partner, the wizard Calizuma. He was to deliver Eternity Man who would be the weapon they would use to annihilate the Earth.

"Why do you keep us around you Caesar wannabe? Do you honestly think we'll ever serve you?" Fusion asked. He was chained up on a cold steel wall by energy restraints. The same went for the rest of his fellow Avengers. The living weapon from the future had decided that perhaps by testing this Emperor character he'd be able to get information.

Slowly Emperor turned from the window and walked slowly to the wall where the Avengers were all held captive. In the golden clad warrior's arms was the little girl Holly-Ann. Her eyes were a deep blue and her expression almost was nonexistent. Emperor had a hold on her mind and he wasn't letting go. "You will serve me as my new knights Avengers. After I build a new world you all we be my enforcers."

"Our enforcers Flavius," Calizuma said as he stepped through a swirling white portal. Floating behind him was Eternity Man who had been covered in a pink magical force field.

Emperor smiled as he turned his head to where his ally was coming through the portal. "Of course Calizuma. You and I are allies. I will not betray. It is not part of the Roman in me."

"The Roman in you didn't stop you from hiding while your fellow soldiers were slaughtered," Calizuma reminded coldly as set Eternity Man on the ground at Emperor's feet.

"That was then. This is now. Do not let your paranoia let this wonderful plan fall apart right when it's about to succeed," Emperor implored as he stepped over Eternity Man and walked to Calizuma.

"Oh I wouldn't call it paranoia Emperor. I just call it being cautious," Calizuma smirked.

"Boy you guys just have to so much trust for each other!" Quoi exclaimed as he punched Emperor and sent him flying into a nearby wall. All the while Emperor's grip on Holly-Ann never loosened.

Out of a portal came the rest of Quoi's allies. Lila Storm and Jack-of-Hearts came out of the portal first. Phermona and Curano followed. Moltarblast was the last one out of the portal. The Celestial Messiah hoped those five guys would be enough help so he could take down Emperor and Calizuma.

"Where are the other Avengers? Don't tell me you got these losers because you don't think us worthy. If so I'd be extremely pissed," Calizuma remarked as he overlooked the super powers that had been sent to fight him.

A barrage of optic blasts hit Calizuma square in the chest and sent him colliding into a wall. The blasts source had been the woman Lila Storm. "I think you'll find we're more than enough challenge for you Calizuma."

Emperor laughed catching the attention of all the heroes. "Maybe you're enough of challenge for him, but how about the Avengers themselves."

Flavius tapped into the power of Holly-Ann to bring the Avengers under his mental control. All of their eyes went white and their chains vanished. Quoi could tell from the way that they hung their heads to the side that something was definitely wrong.

"I think things are about to get ugly here people," Jack-of-Hearts said.

"Master of the damn obvious," Curano said as she pulled out a slingshot and packed it full of acid balls.

"Attack my warriors!" Emperor yelled. The Avengers growled and jumped at their opponents.

Moltarblast hit Fusion with a large rock of cool magma. It simply shattered on the body of Fusion. "You can do nothing to me you big hunk of lava. I have the strength of Thor, Hulk, and Juggernaut all rolled in one."

Fusion punched Moltarblast in the face thinking he would knock the brute back, but his fist simply sunk into the lava that made up Moltarblast's being. "I won't be so easy to take down."

Magma shot out from all over Moltarblast's body and wrapped itself around Fusion's entire body. Soon it covered him entirely. Moltarblast used his power to harden the magma to the point where it was harder than diamond. He knew it probably couldn't hold Fusion for long, but it was worth a try.

Moltarblast's assumption had been correct. Fusion quickly burst through the diamond cage as if it were nothing at all. Before Fusion had time to go on the offensive he was hit again by another barrage of lava rocks from Moltarblast. Fusion fell to the ground hard and tried to bat away the hot rocks. As he batted them away Fusion felt an overwhelming feeling. His body was giving up on him. He had taken on too many

powers at once and now his body was shutting down. How foolish he had been? He had totally forgotten about his new weakness.

"Damn you," Fusion moaned as he fell to the ground unconscious.

Lila Storm meanwhile was fighting against the former leader of the Morlocks, Callisto. Lila was considerably stronger and had more power than Callisto, but the Morlock woman was no stranger to fighting against people she had no chance against. That's what made Callisto who she was though. She fought her hardest all the time no matter what the odds.

"Give it up Cal. You can't win this one," Lila warned.

Callisto simply pulled out her bo staff. "We shall see."

Jumping into the air Callisto was had her staff pointed in such a way that she could jab Lila in the head. Optic blasts from Lila reached Callisto before she had a chance to even get within a good hitting distance. Callisto went flying backwards and rammed right into Scarlet Witch who had been fighting against Curano.

"That was easy," Lila said as she dusted her hands together in a boastful manner.

"But this won't be!" Gilgamesh yelled as he jumped into the air with his knives bared. Before he could reach Lila's backside a black energy blast knocked the monster hunter out of the sky. The blast had come from Jack-of-Hearts.

Emperor watched in horror as his warriors were taken down one by one. Calizuma and himself were now alone against Quoi and his little friends. They still had a lot of power on their side nonetheless. "So you beat four Avengers. Don't get cocky. Beating the two of us will be a whole other matter."

"Then cut the talk and show us what you got!" Quoi exclaimed.

"He won't have to! This battle is over Emperor," Calizuma exclaimed as he outstretched his hand and a yellow bolt of energy flew from it. The bolt hit Holly-Ann Ember and she was gone in a flash. While this was happening Calizuma had shot another bolt out of his opposite hand that hit Eternity Man. He was gone just as Holly-Ann Ember was.

Emperor's eyes flared up with gold colored energy. "How could you Calizuma? We were so close! The world could have been ours! Do you hear me? OURS!"

"You're beat Emperor. Just give it up," Jack-of-Hearts said.

"Perhaps I'm beat, but I'll hardly give up!" Emperor roared as he used his psionic powers to hit all of the heroes and Calizuma with a powerful mental bolt. Everyone in the room fell to the floor except for Flavius. Then rising up into the air Emperor vanished in a blaze of white light.

The Next Day

"Calizuma is in S.H.I.E.L.D. custody for the time being. Holly-Ann is safe at home, but sadly Eternity Man is nowhere to be found," Quoi reported as he stood outside of Avengers Mansion with an assembly of heroes in front of him.

"One thing bugs me though. Why did Calizuma betray Emperor the way he did?" Lila Storm asked.

"Let's just say I put a little of my magic on him," Phermona laughed as she winked an eye at Lila.

By Brent Lambert

Thor arose from his slumber quickly. In front of him there was a blinding blue light. The Thunder God quickly reached out and grabbed a hold of Mjolnir. He would take down whatever foe intended to invade his second home. He wouldn't admit, but his deepest fear at that moment was another attack like the one the Masters of Evil committed so long ago.

"AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!"

Thor had hoped that his cry would be enough to rouse all of his Avengers from their slumber and come to his aid.

"All that yelling and shouting for me. Really I'm too flattered," Supreme Evolutionary said as he stepped out of the portal with Deathbird beside him.

"Whose dost thou bring into Avengers Mansion, Deathbird?" Thor asked angered at having been startled by the two of them.

Out of many different corners, doorways, and stairways of Avengers Mansion all of Thor's team came gravitated to the living room. Scarlet Witch was wearing a Tweety Bird nightshirt. Crystal had on some black lingerie and Sersi was clothed in a green robe. Quoi never wore any clothes so he came down looking as he usually did. Jack-of-Hearts came from the kitchen in his usual garb since he couldn't be separated from his armor for fear of his powers going out of control. Since Fusion was a robot he had no need for sleep so he was the most aware of all the Avengers.

"His name is Supreme Evolutionary my Asgardian friend. He is the one that gave the Shi'ar, my people, a new galaxy to reside in," Deathbird explained.

"So what business do you have her Deathbird?" Jack-of-Hearts asked with a stern tone. He had heard of the many cruelties of the Shi'ar woman and her ruthless nature. Jack Hart wondered what connection she had to the Avengers. He would have to ask Quoi later.

The Kree looking Supreme Evolutionary stepped in front of Deathbird. "Actually she's only here because of my business. Deathbird has been my assistant as of late in my quest to help in ensuring the future survival of the universe."

"And so I'm assuming you abandoned your people then," Scarlet Witch said with a clipped tone. The last time she had seen Deathbird was when the avengers battled against Proctor on the Shi'ar homeworld. Wanda had though Deathbird would have taken on the role of Empress.

"My people are under the rule of Gladiator, but if it wasn't for the Supreme Evolutionary my people would still be floating around in a fleet of spaceships, Deathbird relied hoping to add to the credibility of Supreme Evolutionary. The last thing the Shi'ar woman wanted was to for this exchange to take a long time. The Celestial Puzzle needed to be gathered and quickly. Time was of the essence.

"Answer this for me. Just why exactly are you here?" Jack-of-Hearts asked. He had plenty of experience with people of a cosmic nature and what they usually always had in common was that they always wanted. Just what did Supreme Evolutionary want though? Jack had an iffy feeling about this guy.

"I'm here for help. The universe will have need of the Celestial Messiah. Deathbird, Mantis, and myself are trying to prepare the way for the Celestial Messiah, but we need help to do it," Supreme Evolutionary explained. He hoped one person in particular would respond to his explanation.

"What does my mother have to do with any of this?" Quoi asked with a slight anger in his voice.

"Plenty Celestial Messiah. She had plenty to do with this," Deathbird replied. That answer was enough to satisfy Quoi for the moment.

"So just how do you expect us to help you?" Sersi asked. She was skeptical about this Supreme Evolutionary's supposedly noble intentions, but she knew his overall intent was important. The Celestial Messiah would play a role in things on a much grander scale than just this planet. He would be a player on the universal level.

Supreme Evolutionary looked dead at the Eternal woman as he answered her question. "We were hoping that perhaps you could give us a hand. Maybe in the form of a few volunteers."

"You actually think any of us would go with you!" Crystal exclaimed.

"Just what does this volunteering entail?" Quoi asked curiously. He wasn't trusting of this Evolutionary, but the man did seem genuinely interested in Quoi's destiny. That was something that caught Sequoia's attention. Ever since he had been a child his destiny had been a blank canvas. All the Cotati/Human hybrid ever knew was that he

was meant to save the universe. The details were never given to him, but this Evolutionary seemed to know about a piece of this canvas that was Quoi's destiny.

"We have to travel to different dimensions and gather the lost pieces of the Celestial Puzzle. Once this item is assembled only then will things become clearer, but some of these dimensions are extremely dangerous. Deathbird, Mantis, and myself cannot accomplish this mission alone," Supreme Evolutionary explained. He could feel he was getting to Sequoia. If Quoi joined with Evolutionary then perhaps some of the other Avengers would tag along as well.

Quoi looked at Thor and then walked up beside Deathbird. "I have to do this Thor. This is part of my destiny here. I have to be a part of it."

"Callisto and myself will go with him. He will need protection if Quoi is really as important as this Supreme Evolutionary says he is," Gilgamesh said as he and the former Morlock leader walked up next to the Celestial Messiah.

"I will go as well. In my future I remember tales of the Celestial Messiah of the 21st century. I don't want to miss out on the chance of being part of history," Fusion said.

"I can't help, but to feel the same way. This is major. I want to be in on it," Sersi added.

"I wish all of thee good fortune then. May your journey be swift and Valhalla watch over all of thee!" Thor exclaimed. The Asgardian understood all too well having to find yourself and he could see in the eyes of Quoi that same longing. Sersi, Callisto, Gilgamesh, and Fusion leaving with him on his journey was something that Thor also could understand. Wandering warriors needed their companions and Quoi now had his.

"I thank you Thor. We will return once the Celestial Puzzle is gathered. I promise," Quoi said.

Supreme Evolutionary walked into the portal. Deathbird and Quoi followed behind the Kree-looking man. Quoi gave one last look at Thor and winked. Sersi went in next and before she left she waved enthusiastically at Crystal and Scarlet Witch. The monster hunter and the mutant that was part Olympian followed behind the Eternal woman. Callisto gave a look towards Thor and nodded. She had never really thanked him from saving her from that alternate dimension. In a way now she was. Fusion was the last to go through the portal. He breathed deeply before stepping in. Once again his life was taking another turn. Would he be ready for it?

"We're down to four Avengers. Anyone have any ideas on who we should be giving a call?" Scarlet Witch asked as the portal closed shut leaving Thor, Jack-of-Hearts, Crystal, and Wanda all alone in the mansion.

The Next Day (Dublin, Ireland)

Dane Whitman looked over the green hill and stared out into the blue sky. Life had been easy for him this past few weeks and he couldn't help, but to be pissed about it. Dane enjoyed his life as the Black Knight. The danger and life threatening situations gave him purpose. Now after his time with the Defenders the Black Knight was without any of that in his life. Staring out in the sky Dane only saw one thing. He saw emptiness.

"Don't stare too hard Dane. You might find something looking back," a voice joked from behind Black Knight. Turning around Dane saw someone who was both an old flame and an old friend.

"My goodness. I hardly ever expected for you to pay me a visit," Black Knight said as he ran up and gave Crystal a tight hug. Seeing his old teammate filled Dane with a sense of happiness he hadn't felt in a while. Thinking back on old times his situation with Crystal was rocky at times, but he still considered her a good friend.

Backing away from Crystal the wielder of the Ebony Blade asked, "So what brings you here to Dublin?"

A smile faded away from the Inhuman's face. "We need you back on the Avengers. Our numbers are low and we need some people. Reliable people. You were the first one on my list."

"I'm flattered by that Crystal. I really am. I was starting to wonder when I would get to do something again. So where is your jet at?" Black Knight asked.

"At the bottom of this hill. So are you coming with me or what?" Crystal asked with a smile. She already knew her friend's answer.

"And why would I not come with you? You know good and well I'm an adventure seeker," Dane replied as he returned Crystal's smile.

New Orleans (Later on that Day)

"So you mean to tell me that this Supreme Evolutionary guy just came along and snatched up a bunch of your teammates?" Monica asked as she took a sip of her Sprite.

Wanda used her knife in combination with her fork and took a piece of steak into her mouth. The meat was so tender it practically melted in her mouth. After she had finished chewing her food she wiped her mouth with a napkin and responded to Monica's question, "That's exactly what I'm telling you. I'm pretty ticked off about it myself, but Thor was cool about it. I'm not sure how that worked out, but that's just what happened. So now the only Avengers are Thor, Crystal, Jack-of-Hearts, and myself though I believe Crystal has managed to get Black Knight back on the team."

That surprised Photon, "So she really got Dane to come back? I never thought that he was ever going to come back to the Avengers."

"Well he is and I want you to come back too. We're going to need you Monica. So will you come back?"

"Are you sure you want me back?" Photon said responding to Wanda's question with a question. It wasn't something she really liked to do on most occasions during a conversation, but in this case it needed to happen.

"What do you mean Monica?" Scarlet Witch replied with worry in her voice.

"I killed Vision. It's as simple as that. Are you sure you want the person who killed one of the people you loved most on the same team with you?"

"Just the fact you even thought of that shows me you're someone I want on the team. You did what you had to do Monica. No one blames you. Especially not me. I loved Vision with all of my heart, but what he was doing had to be stopped. He left us with no other choice," Wanda replied.

"Alright Wanda! After all that sentimental stuff there's no way I can turn you down," Photon said with a smile as she wiped the corners of her mouth with a white napkin. She placed the napkin on the table and pushed her plate aside. Monica had finished the majority of her food, but she found her seasoned pork chop to be too rough.

"I knew you couldn't turn me down," Scarlet Witch smiled as she took another sip of her shrimp gumbo. "This food is quite good. It's different from the food of my homeland, but it's enjoyable nonetheless."

"You'll have to take me to one of these Eastern European restaurants in the NYC sometime. I love my Cajun food to death, but trying something a little different every now and then doesn't hurt," Monica replied.

Outer Space (The Next Day)

Quasar flew across the space ways with a companion by his side. It was someone who the former Cosmic Protector hadn't seen in some time. His name was Jack-of-Hearts and he was the wilder of the Zero Fluid. The two men looked out into the blackness of space and both realized how beautiful the eternal darkness truly was.

"So did this Supreme Evolutionary character snatch everyone away then?" Quasar asked as worry crawled across his face. Had he heard of this Supreme Evolutionary from any of the intergalactic pubs he visited. Supposedly this guy could create galaxies and rumor had it he had given the Shi'ar on to inhabit after Proctor crushed the Imperium. Quasar wished he could have been there to help the Avengers.

"Yea pretty much Quasar. There were only four Avengers left. Fortunately Black Knight and Photon joined the team yesterday. We need you to round out the squad," Jack-of-Hearts replied.

"Count me in then. I haven't been doing too much as of late anyway and I'm not going to leave my friends hanging in their time of need," Quasar said with a smile.

"I figured you wouldn't."

"And why is that Jack?" Quasar asked curiously.

"You're too much of a sap!" Jack-of-Hearts laughed as he sped off in front of Quasar heading towards Earth.

"Oh! So you want to race huh," Quasar said as he took off to catch up with Jack. He left behind a brilliant yellow streak that could be seen by a hundred worlds.

Avengers Mansion (Later on that day)

The new Avengers were set and ready. They all had been gathered in the Avengers conference room. At the head of the table was Thor, the leader of the Avengers. To the right of Thor was Scarlet Witch and to his left was Crystal. The newest members

of the Avengers; Photon, Black Knight, and Quasar were seated next to Scarlet Witch in that precise order. Jack-of-Hearts had chosen to sit next to Crystal.

"It feels good having the suit on again. I can say that for sure."

"And it doth do my heart well to have thou back in thee mighty ranks of the Avengers again Monica," Thor said.

"Yea the feeling is mutual for all of us Thor, but why'd you call us all together so soon. I haven't even had a chance to get my room together yet."

Thor laughed in his deep resounding voice. It was a laugh that could scare someone who wasn't expecting it, but everyone in this room had spent enough time with the Thunder God to come to expect it. "Thou question hath merit bold Quasar. The Odinson hath gathered you together to speak of thee future of this mighty team."

Before Thor could talk anymore a glob of blue energy appeared over the center of the table all of the Avengers were sitting at. The energy slowly shaped itself into a flat circle. The outer edges of the energy rippled like the water in a river. The center of the energy was flat and clear like glass. Suddenly the image of Satana appeared.

"Avengers if you hear me I implore you to help me! My world is under attack by a force like nothing I've ever seen before. I can't beat it alone. I'm begging you to help me," Satana pleaded before her image faded away like a watercolor painting that had just been rained on. As her image faded the energy dissipated.

"Talk about weird," Quasar said finally breaking the silence that had fallen upon the Avengers.

"If Satana is in need of our aid I don't see how we can refuse her," Scarlet Witch said in her deep Eastern European accent.

"I'll tell you how! She's the daughter of the Devil. That's enough reason for me. None of yall had to fight in Hell recently. I've seen how these demon types operate and trust me when I say it isn't pretty," Black Knight exclaimed. He couldn't even believe that this plea for help was being considered. Whatever was destroying Satana's world Dane could only say good riddance. It meant one less demon lord he would have to take down eventually.

"Satana hath served nobly and justly on thee Avengers. She shalt not be denied! We willst help her to thee best of our abilities," Thor said shocking Black Knight and Photon. Monica was of the mind of Dane. She wanted nothing to do with a demon

queen. Especially someone who was the lineage of the Devil himself. Neither her nor Dane could believe that she had even been an Avenger. They were obviously behind on the times.

"In other words let's get ready to rumble people. We've got a friend to help," Crystal said as she rose out of her seat.

"Crys I can't believe you're down with this! Helping Satana? Do you know how insane that sounds?" Black Knight asked.

"Look Dane we're not asking you to help us. We're telling you to. Satana has proven herself worthy of our trust. She fought side by side with Thor, Crystal, and myself. So you either help us with this or you can walk out of that door," Scarlet Witch replied. She didn't have time to debate whether they should help Satana or not. The woman was being judged on her lineage.

"She's the daughter of the Devil. Is that not being comprehended here?" Photon asked still in a state of pure shock.

"You cannot judge someone by who their parents are Monica! If that was the case none of you should consider me a friend. My father is Magneto! Magneto the ruler of Genosha. Am I not worthy of your trust Monica? Because my father is Magneto am I not worthy of your trust?" Scarlet Witch yelled angered with her teammates at their attitudes.

"Of course I trust you gal. Never doubt that. You're my friend and if you're that damn serious about helping Satana then I will too," Photon replied. She had no clue what she was getting into, but Wanda was confident in Satana. So she'd have to be too.

"Well, I can't let you guys go at it alone. I'm in," Black Knight said lying his Ebony Blade down on the table.

"Excellent! Then let battle be joined! Avengers Assemble!" Thor yelled as he whirled his hammer into the air and enveloped all of the Avengers in a wind that would take them across dimensions and into Satana's world.

"I hope you're right about this Wanda. I really do," Photon said under her breath.

Satana looked on as a whirlpool opened up in front of her. Out of this swirling mass came the demon queen's former allies, the Avengers. The roster had changed a great deal since Satan had been a member. There were a few familiar faces amongst this squad of heroes though.

"Hello Satana. We've come to help," Scarlet Witch said as she stepped out of the swirling mass. As Wanda walked towards Satana the mass dissipated and revealed Thor.

Black Knight looked around the realm of Satan suspiciously. All he saw was flame, brimstone, and diminutive demons making their way across flaming coals. "Where is that threat you mentioned? I would hate to think we came as this way nothing. Wouldn't you agree?"

Touching the hilt of her ebony sword the demoness proceeded to rise from her throne. "Of course I agree. As for that threat well, it's nonexistent at the moment. I hope you don't mind."

A magical power overtook the Avengers and sent them into the ground. Black Knight tried to reach for his sword, but his arm felt like it weighed a ton. Thor would have went for Mjolnir, but lifting a finger alone took an immense amount of effort. Quasar's cosmically powered bands had ceased functioning and Monica found herself to be devoid of power. Whatever Satana had done made all the Avengers powerless and immobile.

Dane cursed his situation knowing he had been right all along about Satana's cries for help. She had lied to the Avengers and they had allowed themselves to be fooled. If opening his mouth didn't take so much effort Black knight would definitely have some words for Wanda. Unfortunately, he would now have to wait till they got out of this mess. That is if they got out of this.

"This should be so much fun. I wonder whom I will start with," Satana grinned as she unsheathed her ebony sword and let it glisten in the noxious air of her realm. The only reason the Avengers were surviving the harsh environment was because Satana had willed it.

"What is it that you want Satana? Why did you go through all this trouble just to capture us?" Crystal asked struggling under the power the demoness had them held under.

"I only bought you here for one reason. I want Dane's weapon," Satana smiled as she walked over to Black Knight, reached down, and took his Ebony Blade from his hand.

"Bitch," Black Knight exclaimed as he tried with all his might to stop Satana from taking his weapon.

"Oh I assure you Dane that's something I excel at," Satana smiled as she threw down her weapon on the ground. Then she threw down Dane's weapon next to it. Slowly the weapons merged together into one single Ebony Blade.

Satana smiled as she bent down and took the new blade in her hands. "My blade is now more powerful. Over a dozen Ebony Blades all merged into one. The power coursing this sword is massive. I can feel it flowing through me."

"Thou hath the mark of insanity Satana," Thor yelled as he watched Satana gloat over her sword.

"It is the mark of power Thunder God. You'll learn soon enough what I mean."

"No we won't!" Scarlet Witch yelled as she rose up from the ground and flew into the air. As she floated in the air her body and clothes took on a different appearance. Wanda's suit turned black along with her hair. She was in the same form she had been in when letting loose on the Exemplars.

The gloating of the demoness soon turned to worry as she saw Wanda's transformation take place. Despite having a great deal of magical power Satana knew she couldn't take on the Scarlet Witch in her present form. It would mean having to keep her concentration on keeping the Avengers down and on fighting Wanda. That was something she just couldn't do, but that didn't mean she wouldn't try.

"Back down little woman. I don't want to have to hurt you," Satana said as she twirled her sword in the air.

You honestly think you can hurt me. I never thought you to be so foolish. Guess I was wrong.

Wanda's hand began to glow and Satana suddenly felt something jerk her sword out of grip. Looking on in horror the daughter of Satan saw the sword go straight into the hand of Black Knight. All of the Avengers were on their feet and none of them looked at all pleased. Crystal was the only one whose attention wasn't on the demoness. None of the Avengers had ever seen Wanda in this powerful mode of hers before. And to be frank, Crystal didn't like the way her friend looked hovering in the air.

"It's becoming increasingly obvious that I've supremely underestimated you Avengers. But I'm far from out of this fight," Satana said as demons began to creep out from all corners of her realm. The Avengers were about to have to face an army of demons.

This game of yours is pointless Satana! We'll take no more part in it. We're going home!

Scarlet Witch's body turned a golden hue and she blinked out of existence. The Avengers all followed behind her. Satana could only breath a sigh of relief as they did so. She had an army that would fight for her, but the Avengers had faced their fair share of armies. She had fought against an army of Sidrian Hunters and Shi'ar herself while on the Avengers.

Don't worry Satana. Their time will come soon enough. This was only a test. Things are just beginning.

"Of course. We still have so much time ahead of us. And there is still so much to do," Satana said in reply to the massive voice that had just spoke in her head.

Issue #26

“A Cry for Help”

By Brent Lambert

"Help! Whoever is getting this message please help me! Someone hurling glowing rocks and an electrical beast is attacking me! Please help!" the voice cried out as it fizzled out in nothing.

Scarlet Witch flicked off the communication screen with a tiny gray remote and looked back at her fellow Avengers. "We got that message about an hour ago! The static was so bad that I was only able to sort out the voice as you can see that I was unable to pull up an image. I had Photon run voice matches and the voice is an exact match for Dylan Cavanaugh."

Black Knight leaned back in his seat and propped his boots up on the table. "And who the hell is Dylan Cavanaugh?"

Photon rose up from her chair, "Dylan is a mid-level telepath that She-Hulk once helped battle another telepath. I'm assuming he called here because this is the place Jennifer gave him to call if he was ever in a bind again."

Wanda nodded her head and pressed her remote control again. This time the image of a middle age man with bright red hair and an equally red beard to match popped up. He was wearing a gray business suit and had on glasses that covered a good deal of his face.

"So this be thee man that hath need of our help?" Thor asked as he walked into the conference room. He hadn't intended to be late, but he hadn't on planning on having to deal with a group of Frost Giants either.

Wanda nodded again. "Yes this is Dylan. The distress call came from Portland so that's where we'll be headed."

"Is it really necessary for all of us to go? I mean glowing rocks and an electrical beast doesn't sound like nothing maybe two of us can't handle," Quasar commented just in time.

"I find truth in what Quasar says Wanda. I don't think all of us need to go," Black Knight said.

"Fine, but if things go to the crapper it wasn't my fault. Crystal, Black Knight, and Quasar. You guys head to Portland and give Dylan a hand. Handle whatever threat is present and report back here. Understood?" the second in command of the Avengers asked.

"Sure Wanda. Don't worry I'll keep the two boys in check," Crystal smiled as she rose up from her chair and walked out of the room.

15 Minutes Later in the Quinijet

"So who's the real leader of this outfit?" Quasar asked Crystal as he adjusted the many sensors and gizmos that were in front of him.

"I am of course," Crystal said jokingly as she smiled at the pilot, Quasar.

"I think he means something else," Black Knight said from behind the former Cosmic Protector.

Crystal's pleasant smile quickly turned into a stare of confusion. "I'm not following you. What else do you mean then Wendell?"

"I mean who the heck is the leader of the Avengers! Thor is the official leader, but he's hardly ever around. It seems to me like Wanda does a better job as leader than our favorite Thunder God does."

"I do find this to be true as well Crystal," Black Knight chimed in.

The Inhuman royal sunk back in her seat a little as it sped its way toward Portland. She just had a feeling the few minutes it took to get to Portland would stretch on for eternity. "Look the truth of the matter is the two divide their leadership and I think they do a good job of it. Thor is there when it counts the most and Wanda handles all the details of running the Avengers. Thor is much better when it comes to battles and strategy."

"Ahh so Thor does all the easy stuff then," Quasar smirked.

"I would hardly say that Wendell! Leading a team into battle isn't exactly a walk in the park. Especially a team as diverse and as varied as the Avengers," Crystal exclaimed in defense of Thor.

"I have nothing against that Crystal, but see the thing about a good leader is that they can handle the battles and all the small day by day details. That's what made Cap the kinda leader he was during the Avengers and I think that's the kind of leader we need."

"Whatever Wendell! Lets just stop talking about this and worry about saving Dylan. I don't want any of us getting sloppy."

"I'm surprised you would even think we would get sloppy," Black Knight said. He hadn't seen Crystal in a while so her sudden "take charge" attitude was still taking him some getting use to. Something had happened to Crystal to make her more edgy and a lot less gentle.

"Times have changed Dane. The Avengers team you're on now is different from the one you use to be on. We've changed," Crystal replied. She didn't know where Quasar and Black Knight were coming from with these bashing Thor attitudes, but she didn't like it.

"We're about to land! Brace yourselves," Quasar exclaimed as he lowered the ship down into an area outside of Portland.

The ship began to rattle and shake violently making Crystal grip her chair till her knuckles turned white. She had long asked Vision to do something to modify these high-powered jets, but he wasn't around to do that anymore. His death had taken more of a toll on the team than Crystal had ever realized. Thor and Iron Man were at odds with one another, which just created tension between the East and West Coast teams.

Finally the Quinijet came to a stop. Black Knight immediately unbuckled himself from his seat and opened the door. He didn't even wait for the stairs to extend themselves from the aircraft. He just leaped out of the machine and landed on the ground. Quasar smiled at the sight of Dane Whitman being so eager to start this relatively easy mission.

"He never changes does he?" Quasar asked as Crystal grabbed him around the waist. The former Cosmic Protector floated the two of them down to the ground. They landed gently on the ground to find an impatient Black Knight waiting for them.

"I'm sure this Cavanaugh guy would just love the fact that you two are taking your time!" Black Knight exclaimed. He already had his sword drawn and he was ready for action. Something about the new Ebony Blade he had made him want to use it more. The sword was raw power. It had once been hundreds of Ebony Blades, but Proctor

had merged them all into one. Dane gloated every day over the fact that he had the weapon of his arch foe, Proctor, in his grasp.

"Dane has a point. Lets go!"

Quasar enveloped Crystal, Black Knight, and himself in a powerful force field using his Quantum Bands. Then he propelled the force field at near super sonic speeds towards the lab where Dylan Cavanaugh was suppose to be at. As the force field flew across the Portland landscape in a matter of seconds the eyes of Quasar searched for the lab of Cavanaugh. While to Black Knight and Crystal everything may have seemed a blur, but Quasar had been use to traveling at such speeds. He could pick out things other people couldn't while traveling at such speeds.

The former Cosmic Protector picked out the building and guided his companions and himself there. Once upon the ground the three Avengers didn't se anything that would indicate that any sort of struggle had taken place. There were no destroyed sections of the building. There were no flames or smoke.

"You sure you took use to the right place Wendell?" Crystal asked worrying that they were going to let Dylan slip through their fingers. She could just see the anger that would be etched all over Thor's face.

"Trust me Crys. He definitely took us to the right place. My sword can feel it," Black Knight said as he pulled the Ebony Blade from its hilt. Dane was still learning about all the new powers of his enhanced Ebony Blade. One thing he did learn quickly was that this sword could detect evil and detect it well. Holding the sword was like having pure power in the palm of his hand. Black Knight was no stranger to fighting temptation, but something about this sword made this struggle all the harder.

"The sword has spoken. We're going in," Quasar said feeling awkward that a sword had been his only defender. Crystal had doubted him and Black Knight was about to until his sword had told him otherwise.

"I'm sorry for doubting you Quasar. I'll know better next time," Crystal apologized as she walked through the doors of the building. As she stepped through the doors she turned her body to diamond. In that form she would be less vulnerable to attack.

Before the Inhuman had a chance to react she was hit in the chest by three glowing yellow rocks. Crystal went flying back in the arms of Quasar. Looking up at Wendell she said, "Thanks for the catch!"

"Anytime. Now lets see just who flung them prehistoric baseballs," Quasar said as he erected an energy shield around himself and flew off into the building. The first two people he saw waiting for him were two foes that the Cosmic Protector had only the privilege of hearing about. He had never been in battle with either of them.

"Go no further Avenger!" Oort the Living Comet yelled.

"Or you'll be struck down like your friend," Zzzax said in a voice that sounded like listening to a snowy television set.

"Avengers don't back down!" Black Knight yelled as he unsheathed his Ebony Blade. Close behind him was Crystal. She was still a little dazed from Oort's attack and she didn't want to jump directly into battle.

"Then you will die!" Zzzax roared as he unleashed a barrage of electrical energy at Dane. Crystal jumped into front of her one time lover and took the hit full on. The electricity had no affect against her nearly impervious diamond form.

Black Knight jumped over Crystal's head and while he was over Zzzax he thrust his sword into the electrical being. As the sword pierced Zzzax's electrical form black energy flowed out of the sword like ink from a spilled cup. Zzzax let out an anguished cry as he fell to the ground twitching. Before he impacted with the ground Black Knight pulled his sword from Zzzax's body and landed gracefully behind the electrical brute. All this happened within a matter of seconds.

Quasar meanwhile was blasting away the glowing rocks of Oort like he was playing an old Atari game. He could see the frustration growing on Oort's face and he couldn't help, but to laugh at it. This made the man from the 50th century even more agitated. Suddenly the yellow rocks stopped flying at Quasar. Looking around the former Cosmic Protector found himself in a world of swirling colors. He felt like he was in the middle of a Kaleidoscope.

"You think to stop me! You're a fool Quasar. I'm from the 50th Century. I have technology you can't even begin to comprehend," Oort exclaimed. His voice could be heard all across the strange world Wendell found himself in, but the man from the future was nowhere to be found.

"I'm here Quasar. Look!" Oort yelled as Quasar turned his head quickly to see a man wearing what looked like a sleek astronaut helmet. He wore a golden chest plate that had a silver diamond in the middle of it.

"Take us back! I don't have time for childish games!" Quasar said angrily.

"And neither do I," Oort replied as he pressed a button on his golden glove. Pink, blue, and purple energy came crashing down on Quasar from all directions. Wendell was not sure how long he could keep up his shield. He knew it couldn't be for long.

"I will not...LOSE!" Quasar yelled as energy discharged from his Nega Bands. So much energy that all of Oort's was sent back to whence it came. The energy continued to pour out at such a fast rate that it enveloped the entire world Oort had him trapped in and shattered it like glass.

Wendell now found himself back in the real world and a smoking Oort the Living Comet was on the ground underneath him. He only looked at Oort for a second though as passed out right into the arms of a lovely Inhuman.

"You think he's okay?" Crystal asked Black Knight who was rapidly approaching the scene.

"I don't know. What happened?"

"One moment I saw Quasar fighting Oort and then the next they were gone. Then just as quickly they came back. I don't have any idea what happened," Crystal said her voice full of her worry. She bit down on her lip to calm herself.

"Let's just try to find Dylan and get back to the Mansion," Black Knight said grabbing Crystal's shoulder.

"Yea I suppose. Did you hear that?" Crystal asked as what sounded like a barely audible buzzing entered her ear. Looking behind her there was a man floating in the air with pink energy floating around him.

"Looks like we aren't done here yet," Black Knight said as he pulled out his sword. He looked confident as he prepared to strike, but in truth he wasn't. Dane had no idea what his new sword could do. In fact he had no idea it was going to do what it did to Zzzax. He wouldn't let his other teammates know about his insecurities in his Ebony Blade though. All of them had enough problems on their plate as is without him adding to any of them.

"I have no quarrel with you this day Avengers. I already have what I came here for anyway. But be warned. I'm coming for you and when I do come I'll rock the foundations of your world!"

With that forewarning the energized Dylan disappeared along with Zzzax and Oort. Black Knight put his sword back into its sheath. "That wasn't Dylan talking."

"I know, but the question is who was it then?" Crystal asked. One more thing for the Avengers to have to worry about.

"This is the place my friends," Silver Surfer said grimly as he overlooked the Mars sized blue planet below them. The planet was one of many that the Shi'ar had yet to explore. Supreme Evolutionary had created quite the large galaxy for the Shi'ar and they had yet to explore many of the new worlds they had within their new empire. If Norrin's information was correct this seemingly empty planet was where one of the most powerful beings in the universe was planning something sinister. This man had defeated him and many others single-handedly. His name was Tyrant and to hear that name said all you needed to know about him.

"Do you know exactly where he is on this planet?" Beta Ray Bill asked as he stood suspended in space next to Silver Surfer and Red Norvell. The former Herald of Galactus had asked him to help him on this mission. Norrin had assured Beta Ray Bill and Red Norvell that this mission was of the utmost importance. Something was definitely wrong about this planet. Stormbringer seemed to shiver as if it knew evil was waiting for them on this world.

"I can sense his power. Tyrant is in the Southern Hemisphere of this planet. I'll guide the both of you to him," Silver Surfer said as he sped off for the planet at a speed faster than any vehicle on Earth could hope to match. He didn't want to waste his time. Tyrant had to go down and fast. If the maniacal beast was allowed to get his plans in motion they might be no stopping him.

"Guess we better catch up," Red Norvell laughed as he threw himself into the direction Norrin had gone into.

"This will not go well," Beta Ray Bill sighed as he flew off to come up close behind Red Norvell. He called out to him, "Do you know anything of Tyrant?"

"I know he kicks ass o' plenty! Is that enough?" Red Norvell replied his voice barely audible over the roaring winds as the two men entered into the planet's atmosphere.

"No. Understand that the three of us aren't enough to defeat Tyrant! Not nearly enough!" Beta Ray Bill warned as they came up closer to the speed of Silver Surfer.

"Despite that fact my friend we must find out what Tyrant is up to. He has to be stopped!"

"I understand this Norrin, but no one will know what Tyrant is up to if we aren't around to tell the story," Beta Ray Bill explained. He was weary of fighting Tyrant in a direct conflict. They should be using far more subterfuge in finding out what Tyrant had in mind. Usually Norrin was more practical than this. What drove him to such hasty battle?

"Believe me my friend when I say I understand your worries. Trust me that word of Tyrant's plans will get out. I promise," Silver Surfer assured. The strength in his voice had been enough to set Beta Ray Bill's worries aside.

"I trust you my friend. Let us find out what foul deed Tyrant is planning," Beta Ray Bill proclaimed.

"Yea I don't feel like being on this planet too long. The air stinks," Red Norvell commented as he stopped in mid-air above a bright pink tree.

"Are you sure it is not you, my friend?" Beta Ray Bill joked as he stopped next to Red Norvell.

"Tyrant lies to the east," Silver Surfer said as he pointed over the blue horizon to what looked like a gray spike jutting out of the planet. Norrin flew off into the air abruptly leaving Beta Ray Bill and Red Norvell unexpectedly behind. As Norrin flew he passed over miles and miles of yellow plants that swayed wildly from the wind he created.

"Talk about eager," Red Norvell remarked as he took off to follow Silver Surfer. He waved his hand back for Beta Ray Bill to follow. The alien guardian nodded and flew off to meet Red Norvell.

"Norrin lets the past guide him. It is folly," Beta Ray Bill said wearily looking forward at the silver haze that was Silver Surfer.

"Lets just worry about catching up to him," Red Norvell replied.

"Hurry allies! The tower of Tyrant is near."

"Yea sure. Whatever you say oh naked gray man," Red Norvell groaned. Within a few seconds Norvell and Beta Ray Bill had caught up to the Silver Surfer. He was floating in front of the large tower that obviously belonged to Tyrant.

"Our foe awaits us inside."

"Any ideas on how to get in?" Red Norvell asked looking over to the Surfer.

"Yes. I'll manipulate the molecules of the building to allow us to pass through," Silver Surfer said as he held out his hand and purple energy began to emanate from it. The gray tower seemed to shiver for a second.

"Are we ready?" Beta Ray Bill asked as he gripped Stormbringer tighter than he had the entire trip to this planet. He was about to take on one of the universe's most fearsome monsters and call he could was cringe inside. Beta Ray Bill was not a coward in any sense of the word, but fighting someone of the magnitude of Tyrant was something he knew to be cautious of.

"Yes, it's time to go. Prepare yourselves my friends. The battle we're about to face is not an easy one," Silver Surfer said as he shot off through the tower.

"Hey wait up!" Red Norvell exclaimed as he followed behind Norrin.

Beta Ray Bill held his hammer. Looking down on the tower he took a deep breath. Something about this mission felt entirely wrong. Evil was waiting for him inside. Pure, untiring evil. The kind that made you wake up with a cold sweat at night. Nonetheless, he would not abandon Norrin and Norvell to the darkness that awaited all of them in that tower. He would aid them as best as he could.

"Time to go," Beta Ray Bill said to himself as he flew off into the building that Silver Surfer had made intangible.

"Took you long enough," Red Norvell whispered with scorn as Beta Ray Bill landed on the ground.

"It matters not now Norvell. I can sense Tyrant near. Down that hall," Silver Surfer said in a low voice as he pointed down the silver hall. At the end of the hall there was a glowing blue light. It illuminated the entire hall.

"So I suggest we go and handle him," Red Norvell smiled. It was time to get down and dirty with Tyrant. No matter what the consequences were for that battle.

"Be silent. I don't want him to expect us," Norrin said as he began to creep down the hall. Both Norvell and Beta Ray Bill latched their hammers to their belts and followed behind the Silver Surfer. The two had been afraid that their large boots would make too much noise as they walked along the nearly empty hallway. Fortunately, that was not the case. Perhaps Tyrant had gotten tired of hearing metal clanking descending

down the hallways of this place and had some type of device installed to capture the sound. Luck seemed to favor the three cosmic warriors today.

A silver hand went up to stop Beta Ray Bill and Red Norvell from walking any further as they neared the entrance to where the blue light was coming from. Talking could be heard coming from within.

"This device will allow me the control the minds of entire worlds. But I need a catalyst. That's why I want you two to go to Earth with me."

"Who is this catalyst you speak of?" a voice that Silver Surfer immediately knew as Firelord's said. Norrin was deeply confused. Tyrant had counted Firelord amongst his enemies and vice versa. Now they were working together. It all didn't make sense!

"She is an Earth mutant named Karma. I have made a deal with High Evolutionary like I did with the two of you. He'll enhance the woman's powers to the point they need to be. We'll bring her back here and the device will be activated. Then the three of us shall begin our conquests!" Tyrant bellowed.

"It seems we have company. Step into the light Norrin," Morg, Tryant's other ally, laughed as he prepared his axe for battle.

"You three plan madness! I can't allow you to accomplish your task," Silver Surfer said as he looked over at the floating yellow sphere with a glowing blue diamond in the middle. This plan had to be stopped. Tyrant couldn't be allowed to control entire worlds.

"Please Surfer. You are nothing to me! Your threats are as empty as you," Tyrant exclaimed as he stepped forward in front of Morg. His hulking form nearly blocked out that of Morg's. Dark blue tendrils hung down from Tyrant's head contrasting with his light blue skin. The eyes of the fiend were brimming over with bubbly blue energy.

"He's not alone! You're not getting away with this," Red Norvell said as he walked up behind Norrin. He had his hammer in his hand and he knew exactly where he was going to throw it. Right between Tyrant's eyes.

"Leave Morg and Firelord. I'll handle the puny Surfer and his hammer throwing friends," Tryant commanded with a voice that could make forests crumble and mountains crack.

"Are you sure Tyrant?" Firelord said with trepidation. He knew of Tyrant's power, but he did not want to leave him alone.

"I said go! Do not question me!" Tyrant yelled as the energy continued to pour out of his eyes. Firelord and Morg took leave of the building by stepping onto a circular brown disk. The two men disappeared in a flash of black light. Tyrant looked over at the three warriors and smiled, "So where were we?"

"Making you hurt!" Red Norvell roared as he flung his hammer with all the force he could muster. The weapon didn't reach its intended target, but instead of hit Tyrant dead in the mouth. The brute's head flinched a little, but the rest of body didn't even move. It was as if Red Norvell's attack had been entirely useless.

"Tell me there is more to you than that pathetic attack."

Spiraling red energy poured from Silver Surfer's hands and blasted Tyrant square in the chest. If Silver Surfer could sweat he would be pouring out a river right now. The attack was barely even making Tyrant yawn let alone hurt him.

"Why did you come here Norrin? Did you think you could stop me?" Tyrant asked in disbelief. He would have to teach these three the lesson of humility. Leaping into the air he went crashing through Silver Surfer's attack and wrapped his large fist around Norrin's entire head. The Herald's head went through solid metal as Tyrant threw it into the floor. He then backhanded Red Norvell and sent him crashing through the wall and out into the yellow fields of the blue planet.

"Stop it!" Beta Ray Bill yelled as he lifted his hammer up high into the air and sent it crashing down on Tyrant's face.

"When will I get a challenge?" Tyrant asked to no one in particular as he used the same fist he backhanded Red Norvell with to punch Beta Ray Bill. The alien went high into the air and out of the roof. He skyrocketed almost a mile into the atmosphere before coming to a stop. Unfortunately, he was unconscious when he did.

From afar Junn-Moon Lord watched the battle the slaughter that took place. He saw the battle through a mystical black mirror. It was one of the many weapons of the Moon Gods. Someone had to be made aware of Tyrant's plan. Junn-Moon Lord would make sure of that. He wanted that device Tyrant possessed for his own and he would do anything it took to get it.

"Make preparations for Earth, Queen Wastha," Junn-Moon Lord smiled as he made the mirror he was staring into disappear.

"I can't stay anymore. I'm sorry, but I just can't," Black Knight said as he stood on the steps outside of Avengers Mansion. He had a brown bag over his shoulder that pretty much had everything he had bought to the Mansion in it. L.A. was where he was headed and the Avengers couldn't be part of that.

"Why Dane? I don't want you to go," Crystal sighed as she took the hand of Black Knight's into hers.

Dane quickly pulled back from the Inhuman woman, "See this is what I'm talking about! You say you're with Exodus, but then you try and flirt with me. Why do you do this to people? Does Bennet even know how many times you cheated on Pietro?"

That question earned Black Knight a slap from Crystal, "How dare you question my feelings for Exodus? Don't try and put this on me! You're leaving because you can't handle the fact I'm with someone you hate. I know you still want me. I can see it in your eyes."

"Maybe I did Crystal. Just for a little bit I did. Now I feel sorry for poor Exodus. I wonder how long till you cheat on him! You know what? The both of you deserve each other!" Black Knight yelled as he walked away from Crystal and began his march to the gates of Avengers Mansion. He wasn't going to look back. Crystal wouldn't get that satisfaction from him. Not now. Not ever.

"Things are about to get nasty for the Avengers," Blood Mage laughed as he stepped away from his boiling pot of children's blood. Ever since his master, Yamu, had fallen to the Avengers he wanted nothing less than total vengeance. Nothing would stop him from having it.

"I'm sure the heroes will be able to handle it. They did after all defeat our master," Rex said his voice nearly devoid of any sense of hope. His servitude with Yamu had been everything to him. It had been his life. Now that had been taken away from him. There was nothing left for him.

"They needed help to defeat our master. We'll wait until this current threat passes. Then the Avengers will be weak. That's when we make our move against them," Gandriel smiled as he floated in the air above his fellow refugees.

"So Neal where you from?" Quasar asked as he took a drink of his wine.

"My parents are both from Korea. I was raised in Queens though," Neal replied.

"The hard knock life huh?"

"Not really. My life wasn't entirely bad. I wouldn't say hard knock," Neal laughed.

Quasar sat his drink down on the table and pulled out a deck of cards from his pocket. Looking over to Neal he asked, "Wanna play?"

"What's the game?"

"Poker. I figure I might as well get a game in pretty soon."

"Why is that?" Neal asked curious.

"Cuz with the Avengers trouble seems to always come our way," Quasar winked as he began to pass out the cards.

Avengers Assembled!

Alright man, I finally got a chance this weekend to sit down and read your full run to date (all 15 issues!), and I got a few comments for you.

First off, thank you for bringing in characters like Jack of Hearts, Photon, Quasar, and the Black Knight (even if Dane is winging his way over to Champions as I type this). As much as I admired your attempt to go with a completely off-the-wall roster for the start of your run, I was still unconvinced by the characters you brought in. As the Scarlet Witch herself said in one of your later issues, heroes shouldn't just be given Avengers status on a whim. I mean, these are the Earth's Mightiest Heroes we're talkin' about here! People like Callisto, Gilgamesh, and Satana just do NOT fit the team's premise (and hey, I'm even a huge Satana fan, lol).

While not being too impressed with the first arc, I felt the series really came into it's own with the issue that introduced Quoi to the team. I *liked* that guy, and I'm looking forward to his return later on in the series. In the same vein, I was glad to see you finally get a handle on Crystal's character. At the beginning, it seemed as if her only purpose on the team was to make bitchy remarks to Wanda, but now her relationship with Exodus has really gone a long way to giving her a more defined

personality than just "I hate Pietro!". Thor continues to shine under your guidance as well, but c'mon man...let's see the Thunder God mess some people up!

But yeah, the series is getting better with each issue, despite the awkward start to your run. Keep up the good work, and I'll keep on reading.

Chris

"We got a dimensional disturbance outside of the mansion! Everyone head out their now!" Crystal said over the Mansion's intercom as she stared at the security cameras surrounding the Mansion. Before she could even get up out of her seat Thor, Quasar, and Photon were already on the scene. Walking out of the room she saw Jack-of-Hearts flying by.

"Better hurry slow poke!" Jack-of-Hearts teased as he zoomed by the Inhuman woman.

"Tell me about it," Crystal huffed as she ran after Jack.

"What's going on?" Neal asked as Crystal ran by the kitchen.

Looking back she said, "I don't know yet, but you might want to head to the basement. Make sure you stayed armed! Jarvis will show you where we store our weapons."

"Yeah sure. Take care of yourself out there," Neal said with a sinister smile. He was curious though. Just what had the Avengers running like a stampede of wild bulls.

"Will do!" Crystal yelled as she took off around the corner that lead to the door of the Mansion. In the front yard she would find the dimensional disturbance.

Walking outside she saw the disturbance was a group of tall men and women. Each of them were very much black and they almost seemed like living obelisks. They held power and regality about them. Crystal knew of these things well. She was a member of the Inhuman Royal Family. A royal could always tell when another royal was around.

"Who dost thou be and why hast thou intruded upon the sacred sanctity of this abode?" Thor asked with Mjolnir in hand.

He's always ready to clobber someone. What if they're here for help?

"We are the Moon Gods, Asgardian! You would do well to pay us the proper respect. We have come seeking your aid to stop the madman known as Tyrant. He plots to

conquer the entire universe," Junn-Moon Lord said pulling his black cloak over his obsidian form.

"Tyrant!" Thor, Quasar, and Jack-of-Hearts all said simultaneously.

"Who's Tyrant?" Scarlet Witch asked feeling quite ignorant at the moment.

"Only one of the darkest and most powerful forces in the universe. He's put the smackdown on a whole bunch of the good guys Wanda," Quasar informed.

"What is he planning?" Jack-of-Hearts asked Junn-Moon Lord.

"He seeks to control the minds of entire worlds with a device he has acquired. Though he needs a catalyst to activate it. He seeks the Earth woman known as Karma. Know that he does not act alone. Firelord, Morg, and High Evolutionary assist him," Queen Wastha warned speaking for her husband.

"Is Tyrant already here?" Crystal asked. She wanted just how much time they had before this big bad got here.

"No, he is not coming for a few days yet. The same goes for Firelord and Morg. We have time to prepare for his arrival," Junn-Moon Lord replied.

"I shalt find Karma! Wanda take the lead!" Thor commanded as he used Mjolnir to wrap himself in a gust of wind and then he was gone.

Wanda didn't seem in the least bit fazed, "Okay guys here's the deal. We need allies in this fight. Tryant isn't going to be a joke. We can't afford to not take him seriously. Crystal ask the Inhumans to give us a hand if you will. Quasar head to the Shi'ar Empire and see what Gladiator can spare for us. The rest of us will see what other preparations can be made."

"Before you take to your tasks there is something else I must tell you," Junn-Moon Lord interrupted.

"And what is that?" Photon asked giving the Moon God a look that pretty told him that what he was about to say better not be bad.

"Silver Surfer, Beta Ray Bill, and Red Norvell are being held captive by Tyrant. They tried to defeat Tyrant on their own, but they were swiftly defeated."

"Crap crap and crap. What do we do boss?" Quasar asked.

"We'll save them later. We gotta focus right now," Wanda said sternly. Quasar nodded and took off at an amazing speed into space.

"I'll head to Attilan ASAP," Crystal said as she headed into the mansion. She was going straight for the Quinijets. Hopefully, Neal had done a good job fixing the suckers up.

Silver Surfer weakly opened up his eyes. Looking around he saw that he was trapped in a blue ionic energy chains as were his fellow partners in crime, Beta Ray Bill and Red Norvell. Neither of them had awoken yet and Norrin could still see that their wounds from the battle with Tyrant were still mending.

What were you thinking dragging them into this Norrin? You must have been insane! Now look at them. They're not even moving! Could you be so blinded by your rage? Are you no better than Firelord who was consumed by his anger? You should have went about this in a different way. A way that wasn't nearly as foolish. Now what world will pay the price for your foolishness. Damn it!

"Ughnn," Red Norvell moaned as he stirred into consciousness. Silver Surfer let out a great sigh of relief. At least one was awake and in time he would be alright. The fact of the matter was that they had failed to stop Tyrant and now he would eventually conquer some unsuspecting planet.

"Take deep breaths my friend. The thrashing we suffered was great."

"Tell me about it Norrin. I can still feel my head ringing. That Tyrant can throw some fierce blows. Oh man," Red Norvell moaned again as he looked over at Beta Ray Bill. The holder of Stormbringer had taken the worse beating of all three cosmic heroes. It was amazing to Norrin that the alien had managed to hold onto life as long as he had.

"He's quite the fighter. I'm sure he'll make it Norvell. Right now we need to get out of here and warn people of Tyrant's plan," Silver Surfer said tugging at his ionic chains. The shackles seemed to be dampening his powers a great deal and he wasn't able to access his molecular manipulation.

"I will not be held here! I WILL NOT!!!" Red Norvell yelled as he ripped himself away from the shackles with every ounce of strength he had. Holding out his hand his hammer, which was seated on a table in the corner, returned to his hand. Lifting his hammer high into the air he brought down the weapon on Norrin's shackles as his full strength quickly returned to him.

"Thank you Norvell. These chains hardly fit my color scheme," Norrin said in a rare joke as he made his board float to the ground. Unknown to many, but the board followed his every mental command. He could have called upon it to free him from the ionic chains, but he didn't want to risk damaging it. Especially since he had no idea how powerful the glowing blue shackles were.

"You don't look too good my friend. I'll get you out," Red Norvell exclaimed as he slammed down his hammer on each of Beta Ray Bill's shackles. The ionic bonds cracked opened like a sliced apple.

Slumping over into Red Norvell's shoulders the alien warrior was simply exhausted. Norvell was strong though and he could lift the load. It wouldn't be too hard he hoped.

"None of you are leaving this place! Tyrant shall not allow it!" a voice called from the shadows. All Norrin and Norvell could see was a silhouette of what looked to be a regular human.

"Who are you?" Red Norvell asked squinting his eyes.

The figured stepped forward revealing his purple frame to the two cosmic heroes, "I'm the Machine Man and you shall not pass!"

Attilan

"It does my heart well to see you again Crystal!" Krosscrux greeted with open arms. Standing next to him were Cohors and Duelllem. They shared the same look of welcoming on their faces.

Crystal took Krosscrux in his embrace. Quickly she pulled back and asked, "Where is everyone else at? I come with an urgent message."

"Crosier and Medusa are out in the garden. Black Bolt has taken Lockjaw for a walk and-,"

"Just take me to my sister!" Crystal exclaimed grabbing Krosscrux's blue hand and dragging him along. Cohors and Duelllem followed behind sheepishly.

"She's quite the forceful one," Duelllem whispered to Cohors.

"Indeed."

Avengers Mansion (An Hour Later)

"High Evolutionary is crucial to Tyrant's plan. Someone should be heading to Mount Wundagore," Junn-Moon Lord suggested as stood around the Avenger's underground conference room.

"Tall and black has a point over there. We need to start taking some action," Photon said.

"Then let's get to it. The cavalry is here," Crystal smiled as she walked into the already crowded room with the Inhumans behind her.

Wanda nodded at the presence of the Royal Family and laid out a plan of action, "Okay here's how its going down. There will be two groups. One that attacks Mt. Wundagore and one that waits for Tyrant to arrive. First though I want Crystal and Medusa to track down Thor. You three can help him cover ground faster and if Tyrant gets to you guys first you'll be able to defend yourselves for a time. Karnak, Triton, the three new guys, Mikah, and Junn Moon-Lord head to Mt. Wundagore. The rest of us will wait here for Tyrant."

"I will deliver everyone to Mt. Wundagore, but be warned. Tyrant is a force like you've never seen. Fight him, but don't think you can win. It is an impossibility. You have not the power needed," Junn Moon-Lord stated as he threw his black cloak into the air and was gone. Mikah and the others disappeared shortly afterwards.

"Don't listen to him. We'll do fine," Wanda reassured though in truth she wasn't all that sure herself. Part of her hoped she was right, but Tyrant was a force of pure power. How would they be able to stand against him?

"Junn knows of what he says Avengers. We won't beat Tyrant," Queen Wastha said with just as much confidence in her voice as Wanda.

"We'll be sure to give him hell then!" Jack-of-Hearts yelled.

WHOORP! WHOORP! WHOORP! INTRUDER ALERT! WHOORP! INTRUDER ALERT!

"I guess he decided to show up a little early," Gorgon mused.

"Crystal and Medusa get out of here while you can! We'll handle the light weight," Wanda smirked as she slipped on her long red gloves.

"Good hunting guys!" Crystal exclaimed as she took her sister's hands and went down a back doorway that led to the Quinjets. The tunnel hadn't been used in a while. It was built in case of emergency evacuations. This situation was close to call for a use of the tunnel.

By Brent Lambert

Firelord and Morg flew through the sky at such a pace that they left behind orange and burgundy streaks in the sky. Morg himself wasn't flying, but Firelord was carrying him. The two of them zoomed towards their target. The mutant woman called Karma. She was key to Tyrant and High Evolutionary's plan. Without her all else would fail so the former Heralds had quite the burden on their shoulders. All of Tyrant's plans fell to them.

“Do you find it strange?” Firelord asked as they flew through the sky.

“Find what strange?” Morg replied wondering just where Firelord intended to go with his question.

“We're working for a man who had once been our foe.”

“You're right Firelord, but things are different now. Many more strings are in this tapestry than you know about,” Morg replied.

“So it would seem. Though one question does bother me. You hit Tyrant with the Ultimate Nullifier, but he still is here. Why is that?” Firelord inquired.

“That's part of the tapestry I spoke of. You'll find out what has been woven in time,” Morg said.

“Your speech is like a riddle. I do not like it in the slightest! Be straight with me or I'll--!”

“Look down there! The woman we seek!” Morg yelled having felt the presence of the mutant Earth woman they were meant to capture. High Evolutionary had given them a device that would allow them to track down the mutant woman. Morg was the one that chose to wear it.

“Hold on then! We're about to kick it up a notch!” Firelord yelled excited as he increased his speed. He was heading straight towards the Earth and he loved every minute of it. Unlike some of his fellow Heralds he wasn't ashamed to admit he enjoyed the power Galactus had given them.

Karma had journeyed to this tiny village to seek out some sense of relaxation. She needed to recover from the whole ordeal with Sinister and the Dawn. Working alongside that freak made Karma sick to her stomach, but it had been a necessary evil. Karma knew first hand the evil that Shadow King represented. He had taken control of her some time ago and he abused her body with his sick indulgences. She truly felt for Kitty and the rest of Shadow King's X-Men. They were going to need to recover. Being manipulated and used was never something you got over easily. It took time and friends. Luckily Kitty and the rest had both.

Hearing a roaring sound Karma looked up into the air. She could have sworn the sound was coming from two very large rockets. Upon investigation she could see an orange and burgundy trail in the air. To her horror the two trails were headed towards the very village she was in. Karma had seen many things during her time as a New Mutant, but she didn't know what to make of this. Could China finally be striking against Vietnam? Were the two objects asteroids? She was clueless and like the rest of the village she could only do one thing. She ran.

The screams of the villagers didn't even matter to Karma as she ran. All that mattered was surviving. Whatever the two objects were they couldn't be anything good. A crazy man standing on a shifty platform seemed to be the only one who wasn't running. Instead he was preaching about the coming end and the despair that was to come to the world. Karma barely even paid attention to the madman's mumblings and she just kept running...right into the arms of Thor.

"Be still milady! Thy danger is great, but not in the way thou thinkest," Thor said gripping the shoulders of the mutant woman.

"Whoa! What are you doing here?" Karma asked a little bewildered at the sight of the Avenger.

"Two foes of terrible power hath set their foul sights on thou," Thor replied looking up at the approaching Morg and Firelord.

"So I'm guessing that's what the two streaks are then," Karma said and before she could continue on any further there was a great crash. Firelord and Morg had made impact with a large brown house. The house crumbled away into nothing and sent debris flying in every direction.

Thor shoved Karma behind him and beckoned her to catch up with the still running villagers. He held his hammer tight as the two beings walked out of the rubble they had created. Firelord swung his staff around in a manner similar to an Army cadet and Morg held his large axe firmly between his hands.

“Karma tis not for thee taking!” Thor yelled to the former Heralds.

“Your noble talk really gets on my nerves,” Firelord exclaimed as he took off in flight slightly above Thor’s head. Before he even got the chance to zoom past the Asgardian, Thor grabbed his ankle in mid-flight. Thor threw him into Morg and at the speed he had been going it was enough to knock both men back a good bit. Dirt, trees, and houses were displaced as Morg and Firelord went pummeling across the ground.

“Thou shalt learn to hold thy wicked tongue!” Thor laughed as he watched the two bodies slide across the field. Launching Mjolnir into the air the Thunder God took off in pursuit of the past Heralds.

When he came upon the two laid out beings he threw Mjolnir straight into the chest of Morg. The being staggered from the blow and let out a great moan, but that momentary distraction allowed Firelord to blindside Thor with a blast of fire from his staff. The Thunder God was thrown back high into the air and before he knew it Morg was there with him.

“Enjoy the way down!” Morg yelled as smacked Thor in the face with the flat side of his axe. Thor cried out as he crashed into the ground. Only a moment afterward Morg had landed square on Thor’s hip. Looking to Firelord he said, “Find the girl! I’ll handle Thor!”

Firelord nodded his head and flew off towards the crowd of still running villagers. He could spot the one he sought clear as day. Firing off a blast he incinerated some of the villagers, but stopped Karma dead in her tracks. Firelord was about to fire off another blast just for the heck of it, but something held him back.

“Stop what you’re doing right now!” Karma exclaimed as she used her powers of mental possession to slow down the assault of Firelord.

“I won’t ever stop till I have you in these arms,” Firelord grinned as he moved in closer to the Vietnamese girl. Out of nowhere a giant bolt of lightning covered his entire body. Firelord cried out in pain and fell to the ground with smoke billowing off his body.

“Men these days can’t take no for an answer,” Crystal said electricity still sparking from her hands as she moved towards Karma.

“Thanks. I’m guessing you’re with big and blonde?” Karma asked.

“Yea. And from the looks of things he might need a hand. I want you to get out of here though. My sister will take you to Avengers Mansion. You’ll be safe there,” Crystal promised.

Karma wasn’t too keen on leaving, but this Crystal looked worthy of trust. So reluctantly, she left with Medusa. She just hoped this Avengers Mansion was as safe as ol static cling girl claimed it to be.

Medusa leaned over and whispered in Karma’s ear, “I’m really taking you to the Inhuman kingdom of Attilan. There you will be safer than the Mansion. My sister only said it as to throw off Firelord. No need to have him come looking for you.”

Karma looked back at Firelord and nodded in agreement.

“You stopped me puny woman! You will regret that,” Firelord groaned as he rose to his feet.

“I doubt it,” Crystal mocked as she turned her body into magma and the sky turned dark.

Mt. Wundagore

“Sir! We have intruders at the gates!” a Knight of Wundagore said as he came up behind a brooding Evolutionary.

“I knew it would come to this. Tyrant is not the best at keeping his plans secretive. Prepare the defenses. Protect this sanctuary with your lives,” High Evolutionary said not seeming to show any emotion as he sat on his throne.

“Yes sire,” the Knight bowed and turned to his other fellow Knights, “You heard the master! It’s time to fight! For Wundagore!”

“Indeed for Wundagore,” High Evolutionary muttered under his breath. If everything went according to plan soon he would have a thousand Wundagores spread across the cosmos. He would be a power unmatched.

Junn-Moon Lord lashed out with his sword made of black energy. Waving it above his head the Moon God struck down two of the Knights of Wundagore. An alligator Knight leaped into the air and bit the god on his shoulder. The teeth and very soul of the beast was filled with blackness. The feeling threw the warrior off of Junn-Moon Lord’s body and made the Knight quiver with ferocity.

“Learn your place pathetic one,” the dark Moon God said as he turned around and stabbed the Knight through its stomach with his weapon.

“They keep coming out of the woodwork!” Cohors yelled as he poured out sulfuric acid from his pores. Most of the Knights surrounding the Inhuman had the carbon compounds that made them up broken down with agonizing pain. He hated to fight like this, but his powers were born of the Terrigen Mists. So this was his gift and he would use it.

“Fight! Don’t give in,” Krosskrux yelled as he punched a lion Knight and snatched away the sword of another one. Red cosmic energy poured from the eyes, fingers, and chest of the blonde haired man. With his cosmically powered strength he flung the sword into the chest of a bear Knight. The sword ripped through the Knight of Wundagore and five others before coming to a stop in a female zebra Knight.

“You truly have the spirit of a warrior!” Mikah yelled as he slammed his fist into the side of a tiger Knight’s head. The soldier of High Evolutionary went flying into the air and hit the ground with an impact that snapped his neck. The falling soldier had knocked a fellow Knight right into the deadly fists of Karnak. The Inhuman’s power was precise. He could kill you without even thinking much about it. Karnak saw vulnerable spots and he took the opportunity.

“I thank you Moon God. Your attack gave me swift victory,” Karnak said as he stepped back from the fallen warrior.

“Watch out!” Triton yelled a slight distance from Karnak as he jumped into the air and slammed his body into a horse Knight. The two went tumbling to the ground with Triton falling on top. Before any type of rumble could begin Crosier slapped the warrior on the head with his nearly adamantium hard tail. The impact killed the Knight.

Crosier was quite the different looking Inhuman. The Inhuman’s powers were based more on his appearance. Six arms covered with spikes made his punches quite deadly and when he elbowed you it was never out of affection. A lion's head with three eyes made his stare one to bow down to and a 15 foot long tail that was nearly as strong as adamantium made one think twice before taking him on.

“I saw the Knight coming, but I appreciate the fact you care Triton,” Karnak said with some degree of sarcasm. He admired Triton’s bravery, but Karnak was more than capable of handling himself.

“We must keep the fight going. We cannot give in,” Duelllem announced to everyone as he walked up the hill with hundreds of deers behind him.

“Why do you bring animals to this place?” Junn-Moon Lord asked confused at the actions of the Inhuman.

“For artillery,” Duelllem laughed. The Inhuman’s abilities allow him to copy DNA from anything and anyone he touches. He can then use that information to create clones of someone or mix the DNA together to make his own creatures. So with those abilities Duelllem simply created a horde of deer. He could have created combinations of his Inhuman brethren, but he had issues with creating sentiments to only lead them to slaughter. And these deer made for quite the unsuspecting warriors.

“You bring gentle animals to battle! I don’t doubt your intentions fool, but just your choices,” Mikah replied as he stared at the coming wave of Knights. Cracking his knuckles the Moon God smiled, “More soldiers to crush!”

“Leave my home!” Scarlet Witch yelled as she stood in front of her charges. Their foe was Tyrant and from the looks of this brute he was not a foe that would go down easy. Wanda was going to hold her ground though. She wouldn’t lose in the face of this enemy. The lives of her friends and of worlds were at stake. Wanda knew nothing would change in victory, but everything would in defeat.

“Why leave when there is so much to be done? You and your ilk are just simple obstacles in my way. You will not stop me!”

“Maybe not, but I’ll make sure to give you hell before you’re done with us! Attack!” Wanda commanded as the battle against Tyrant was joined. The first wave of attack consisted of Quasar, Photon, Jack-of-Hearts, and Tinn the Creator.

Wendell flew high into the air and rammed Tyrant with a gargantuan wave of yellow energy from his Quantum Bands. Waves of power hit Tyrant’s cranium over and over again. Jack and Monica attacked Tyrant with a combination of Zero Energy and light. The joint powers took their aim and struck the titan’s chest. Tinn was the last to contribute his attack. As a Moon God he felt that he should be the last to enter battle since he would be the most glorious.

“For the Moon!” Tinn cried out as he stretched out his black hand. Thousands of tiny crescent shaped pieces of light flew from the palm of Tinn’s hand. Flying across the sky each one of Tinn’s little creations struck Tyrant on an exposed part of his body. The Moon God’s attack was meant to strike Tyrant where he was not already being hit.

Wanda was amazed at the attack taking place. She could barely see Tyrant's body under the mass of energies being thrown at him. There was one glimpse though and what Scarlet Witch saw made her tremble. Underneath the force of Quasar, Photon, Jack-of-Hearts, and Tinn, the man was smiling. Tyrant was actually smiling.

Running forward Wanda yelled, "Watch out!"

None could hear her underneath the roar of power that was being produced by three Avengers and a god. It was at that moment that Tyrant unleashed a massive blue energy wave. Tyrant had once been a Herald of Galactus and a great amount of Power Cosmic flowed through his veins. Enough that he was able to survive the black of space and a thousand nuclear explosions. The Tyrant was not one to be reckoned with.

The blast took Quasar from the sky, made Photon and Jack meet the dirt, and sent Tinn flying to the Hudson. Scarlet Witch had barely managed to save everyone else with a powerful magical shield. The stress from creating such a shield though had taken its toll and Wanda fell to the ground unconscious.

Tyrant looked on the two Inhumans and the remaining Moon Gods with fulfilled eyes. The blue beast loved battle and he had been offered one. Much to the dismay of his opponents Tyrant loved their attempts at hurting them. He was like all other tyrants because he sought to dominate all and Tyrant dominated through the sport of battle.

"Stay back mortals! Let the Moon Gods handle this battle!" Queen Wastha commanded as she unleashed an Akinakès, which was an ancient Persia short sword. Her fellow Moon Gods followed suit and pulled out weapons of their own.

Atkhu, the Navigator and Gorum, the Voyager both pulled out long spears tipped with the black magic of their namesakes. Sheana, the Mother was the last to display her weapons. Two sais filled with all the powers of the Moon were in her hands. Gorgon and Lockjaw watched the gods prepare themselves for battle.

"I think we will have to help our dark and arrogant friends won't we," Gorgon said as he knelt down and stroked the back of Lockjaw's neck. The Inhumans' pet barked in agreement. Standing to his feet Gorgon laughed, "Lets give this Tyrant a lesson he won't forget!"

Come to your deaths! Come and face me Moon Gods! I'll make your immortality short lived!

"I doubt that fiend!" Queen Wastha exclaimed as she teleported behind Tyrant and stabbed him in the back with her Akinakès. Tyrant didn't even flinch from the attack.

Reaching behind him with massive blue fists he snatched Queen Wastha by the black crown that was bound to her head. He then slung her forward right into the spear of Atkhu.

“My Queen” Atkhu screamed as he dropped the spear and moved to his ruler. His black skin reflected off the sunlight as he ran to Wastha. Bending over her he pulled the spear out from her stomach and began to weep at the pain his ruler was undergoing.

“Fight my friend! She will live,” Gorgon implored as he leaped into the air and slammed his hooves into Tyrant’s chest. Lockjaw was close by to the Inhuman as he moved in and clamped his jaws around the leg of the man they were all in a desperate struggle against.

Tyrant made no sound or movement that indicated pain. He simply smacked Gorgon away like a fly. The brutish Inhuman went flying into Gorum with such force that the two were knocked out cold. Then he grabbed Lockjaw by his neck and sent the animal head first into Atkhu. The god had just gotten his resolve and didn’t see the Inhuman pet coming as he stood up. A head to head collision was the unfortunate result.

All that stood in Tyrant’s way now was Sheana the Mother God. Most likely to the surprise of many, Sheana felt no fear at Tyrant’s approach. She felt apprehension perhaps, but not fear. A Moon God was above such pitiful concepts as fear. Though as Tyrant approached the goddess still wished Moonlord had been here to help her fight. Nonetheless, it was not her way to give up. Defeat had been fed to her before and most likely would be given to her in a much bigger serving this time.

“Come monster. Show me something worthy of a god,” Sheana whispered as she charged at Tyrant. Believing that his victory was soon imminent, Tyrant stood with his gargantuan feet firmly planted. The Moon God still had tricks up her sleeve as her foe was soon about to learn.

Before the Mother God had reached Tyrant large green vines sprung up from the ground with all the ferocity of a stampede. Hundreds of vines wrapped themselves around Tyrant’s body and even with all his might he couldn’t free himself. Finally all the vines had won and his body was wrapped in the greenery. The goddess had summoned up the powers of the Earth to entrap Tyrant.

Then just as soon as she had tasted success her spell was crashed to the ground. A great roar came from within the prison Sheana had created and hundreds of burnt vines were sent in every direction. Some flew all the way to the Empire State

Building, the UN building, and the Hudson River. And with all the vines discarded Tyrant now stood brimming with malicious energy.

You now only have your sais to protect you goddess. Will you surrender now?

“Never!” Sheana yelled as she flew forward her Sais poised to attack Tyrant’s chest. In truth the goddess knew the effort was useless, but she had no other options.

Tyrant took both Sais with full force and flinched. The mystical power that Sheana had filled them with was powerful enough to cause him harm. She was the only one who had succeeded in doing that thus far. Grabbing the head of the goddess with one hand he lifted the Moon God up to his face and smiled.

You injure me woman. You’re the only one who has managed to do that thus far. I must compliment you.

Sheana only replied with a wad of spit to the face. Wiping away the spit Tyrant laughed and then punched the goddess with his other fist. He discarded her body as if she were nothing but a piece of trash. Indifference had been Tyrant’s best friend for most of his life. Especially in the midst of a battle. Mercy belonged to those who were weak. Tyrant was anything but.

Making his way across the Mansion grounds he moved to the spot where Scarlet Witch lay unconscious. Lifting the woman high into the air he mocked.

Give me hell huh? Give me a break is more like it.

“You’re right about one thing! I will break you!” Scarlet Witch said as she suddenly flared to life and her eyes went black. Just as quickly her hair and uniform turned the same color. Lifting up her hands she blasted Tyrant in the face with a relatively small blast. The man who had just defeated an assortment of gods, heroes, and royalty went flying back into the air. Skidding his way across the ground the commander of great power couldn’t believe what had just happened to him. Not only had he been knocked back with what looked to be such a puny blast, but also the assault had actually hurt him.

“Stand your ground Tyrant. Now you face true power!”

Lightning bolts came crashing down in all directions on the body of Firelord. The Herald cried out in pain as electricity filled his nervous system. If he weren’t

possessed of such great power he would be dead from such an assault. Fortunately the universe had given him a tremendous gift. One that he would not squander.

“Your trickery is strong Avenger! But even you will not be able to withstand my flames,” Firelord exclaimed as intense fire erupted from the staff of the former servant of Galactus.

“Flames? Man you gotta be kidding me,” Crystal laughed as she made all of the man’s flames fizzle before they even reached her. It took a little effort on the part of Quicksilver’s ex-wife since the flames had been derived from the Power Cosmic. Sersi’s training had benefited Crystal well. For without that training those flames would have consumed her body and left a charring husk behind.

“You believe yourself powerful, but I see the sweat on your brow. Deflecting my attacks strains you. You’ll be an easy kill,” Firelord said flying down low moving like a peregrine falcon towards Crystal.

“I think you’ll find me worthy prey,” Crystal promised as magma erupted from the ground and spewed all over Firelord. The heavy weight of the liquid rock took Firelord into a pool of the hot substance. Many other opponents would have died from such an attack, but the Inhuman Royal knew that she was dealing with no regular foe.

The extreme heat that was now surrounding Firelord quickly turned cold at the command of Crystal. It was such a cold that the winds of Pluto would give pause to it. Creating such a cold and blocking Firelord’s attacks had taken their toll. Taking a deep breath she said, “Maybe I should have just stayed with the X-Men. They don’t have to fight these invincible jerks.”

Hearing a loud crash Crystal turned her attention to the battling Thor and Morg. The two towers were still going at it. The only reason she had even confronted Firelord head on was to buy Thor some time. Despite the fact Thor kicked all kinds of ass, there was no way she was going to have the big guy fight both Morg and Firelord. Crystal had faith that Thor would probably win the battle in the end, but he would take a severe beating. And the Avengers needed Thor somewhat together. No telling if Tyrant had arrived yet or not.

Suddenly the ice that had surrounded the Herald burst open and Firelord flew free of the prison Crystal had created for him. His face was a mixture of trembling both from anger and cold. The head of that bitch would be his trophy. How dare she lock him away? Who did she think she was?

“Woman you just made your last mistake!” Firelord yelled gripping his staff so tight you could swear his knuckles would burst from the flesh. Every muscle in the Herald tensed up with anger. Golden hues surrounded the air around Tyrant’s soldier. He would crush this Avenger and teach all these Earthlings their proper place. They had become arrogant in their power. It was time for them to be taught a lesson.

“I don’t make mistakes on the battlefield. Especially when dealing with hot heads like you,” Crystal exclaimed as fierce winds began to twirl the body of the Herald round and round. Firelord would not let this elemental confuse and entrap him once more. Using his last reserves of strength he pointed his staff at the woman and sent out a powerful enough blast to punch to the Earth’s mantle with ease.

Seeing this oncoming attack Crystal knew that she couldn’t deflect. At least not with her powers alone. Using her powers she erected a semi-circle diamond wall and with the last reserves of strength she had the Inhuman deflected as much flame as she could. The dense diamond wall absorbed most of Firelord’s blast and though it was beginning to melt slightly the diamond wall remained mostly intact.

The defensive maneuver had exhausted the Avenger though and she fell to the ground unconscious. Firelord smiled as he floated down with all the grace of a falling feather to the spot where Crystal laid. When he landed next to his adversary he heard a familiar voice cry out, “Get out of the way you idiot!”

Looking to his right Firelord saw the flying body of Morg. It was too late to move so he could only do one thing, “AHHH!!!”

The bodies collided and both of them were sent flying off into the distance before they came crashing into a burnt out car. They hit with enough force to send the car into a hundred pieces of scrap metal. Firelord and Morg were both out cold and only stirred out of reflex.

“Come milady Crystal,” Thor said as he reached down and lifted the young woman up on his shoulders.

“These warriors are hardly a challenge! Can’t High Evolutionary muster anything better?” Moonlord asked as he hacked away at another Knight of Wundagore with his elongated black sword.

“It doesn’t seem like it. The rest of you head back to assist in the fight against Tyrant. I’ll handle High Evolutionary’s forces,” Duelllem said.

“These deer will hardly be enough to protect you,” Mikah laughed at the ridiculous sight of deer attacking the Knights of Wundagore. The best these animals had done was serve as distractions at best. If it had been up to the Warrior Prince he would have seen every last one of these animals smashed, crushed, and served in large plates.

The Inhuman smirked, “Whoever said I was going to use deer. They were just my first wave.”

Suddenly a loud mixture of roars came up from the forest. Dozens of tigers, jaguars, and grizzly bears poured out of the woodwork to smother the Knights of Wundagore. Junn Moon-Lord nodded, “I see you can handle things yourself Inhuman. We shall take our leave. Just remember our purpose for being here. Keep High Evolutionary’s sight focused on you! Make him blind to all else except for this attack. We cannot afford to have his mind wandering.”

“I understand. Now go!”

With that a black mist covered the field of battle and just as quickly that mist disappeared. Moonlord and the others had all vanished.

“Move out of our way Machine Man! We have business to attend to,” Silver Surfer demanded standing tall against the new threat. He was weak from his battle with Tyrant as were Beta Ray Bill and Red Norvell. The three of them though should easily be able to handle a pile of bolts. Hopefully anyway.

“Your business will have to wait Norrin. I cannot allow you passage,” Machine Man repeated for the third time.

“You know of me, but I know nothing of you. That alone prevents me from causing you harm. I’ll say one more time. Move out of our way!”

“I’m afraid you will have to try and cause me harm. As a servant of Tyrant I cannot let you pass” Machine Man said as his entire body into a transparent form. All of his internal components could be seen and they shocked the three heroes. His body had hundreds upon hundreds of tiny illuminated blue cords that streamed through its entire frame. At the center of the robot’s body was a glowing yellow ball of light.

Silver Surfer jumped on his board and flew forward. He didn’t have much maneuverability in the small room, but Norrin didn’t need it. When he was only inches away from Machine Man he threw his legs up intending to slam his board into

Machine Man. The attack failed miserably as the former Herald's board passed through the body of the robot. X-51 lifted his arm up in the air and slammed it in the silver chest of his opponent. Norrin fell to the ground experiencing something he hadn't felt in a long time. He couldn't catch his breath.

"Now!" Beta Ray Bill yelled as he threw Stormbringer in the direction of Machine Man. Red Norvell followed suit and threw his hammer. Both massive weapons came at X-51 with great speed.

"Your tactics are flawed," Machine Man said as he snatched both hammers out of the air bare handed by stretching out his arms. Tossing the hammers to opposite sides of the room the machine's black eyes turned red, "My technology is far superior to almost any in the galaxy. Celestial technology composes my entire being."

"Well, damn. I thought we had enough trouble with Tyrant," Red Norvell laughed to disguise his hopelessness. A warrior's spirit made up Norvell though and he would not run away from a fight. Charging forward Norvell slammed his body into Machine Man. He passed right through the robot and hit the nearest wall head on.

Norrin finally caught his breath and shot his hands upward. He unleashed multicolor blasts from his palms that struck the frame of Machine Man. The assault was meant to disrupt the molecular structure of whatever it hit. X-51's body shook violently and his body changed back to its original purple android form.

"Forgive me Silver Surfer. Tyrant kidnapped me and made me into his life. He enhanced my technology and made sure I would distract you," Machine Man said holding his head down in shame. For all intents and purposes this android now possessed all the emotions, feelings, and everything else that entailed being human. The Celestial technology made sure of that.

"No worries friend. Just tell us you can get us to Earth quickly," Beta Ray Bill said holding out his hand as Stormbringer returned.

"I can take you to Earth," Machine Man said as a purple square portal opened up behind him, "Be warned. The battle against Tyrant is already happening. I can see it. At least Tyrant allowed me to see it."

"Then we need to move quickly. The heroes of Earth will need our aid," Silver Surfer said picking up his board and stepping through the portal.

"You didn't account for my power did you Tyrant?" Wanda yelled as black energy surrounded the body of Tyrant and ripped through him like an axe cleaving paper. The

agonizing screams of Tyrant's pain couldn't even be heard for Scarlet Witch simply made the sound of his voice disappear into her head. She wanted to be the only one to enjoy the delicious screams of this monster who had dared to attack the place she called home.

Tyrant threw his body into the air, unexpectedly, and flew right into Wanda. The two bodies collided and Scarlet Witch hit the ground headfirst. Dirt went flying in all directions and the woman was now in a small crater. Satisfied, Tyrant smiled as he hit the ground. Walking over to the crater Tyrant prepared to unleash a killing blow on the pathetic Earthling, but he had one final taunt to deliver.

Learn your place petty girl. Your power is pitiful as is the whole of your planet.

A giant black fist soared upward and struck Tyrant in the face. He went flying back into the air and landed close to where the last Moon God had fallen. Trying to get himself up from the ground was a failed attempt as red spikes protruded through various parts of his body. The powerful alien had been rendered immobile and was once again feeling pain all because of this insignificant woman! How could she be so powerful? He had defeated the best the universe had to offer single-handedly and this one woman was beating him! The idea of it was preposterous.

Rising out of the crater and into the air Wanda guffawed, "You are the one that is nothing Tyrant. I have long wanted to do this to someone and I think you're just the person to do it to."

The spikes that had been in Tyrant's body suddenly turned into solid stone and began to grow. Blood began to flow from the former Herald's body and he clamped his mouth so as not to cry out. He would not give this woman that satisfaction. Reaching deep inside of himself Tyrant turned his very blood into cosmic energy. The stone had pierced his body burnt away into nothing. In a split second Tyrant was up in the air his fists flaying upon Wanda.

Scarlet Witch had barely seen the assault coming so each and every punch landed exactly where it was intended to. Wanda fell backwards towards the ground. Her world went black before she even reached the grass. Tyrant landed beside her unconscious body triumphant. He was about to deliver a killing stomp to the woman when three hammers hit him dead in his face. Normally Tyrant would be able to stand up to such an attack, but he had been greatly weakened. The alien went flinging back into the dirt creating a ditch as he skidded across the ground.

“You’re done with Tyrant! Just give it up!” Red Norvell said as he stood beside Beta Ray Bill and Thor.

“You have failed in capturing Karma and Wundagore is suffering attack even as we speak!” Silver Surfer exclaimed prepared to get up close and personal with Tyrant.

“Allies are few and far away Tyrant. I suggest you leave,” Machine Man added as he held Crystal in his arms.

You are fortunate I tire of this boring fight! Try to make things more interesting the next time I come around.

With that Tyrant disappeared with a flash of bright blue light. Moonlord sighed, “We are indeed fortunate he decided to leave. Despite his injured status he could have still proven quite the formidable foe. One we might not all have walked away from.”

“Perhaps. All that matters this day is that we won,” Silver Surfer said.

“Won? You know nothing Norrin. This is only the beginning,” Moonlord replied sharply.

Epilogue

Tyrant walked into the room and sat down in the large seat that had been prepared for him. Only a few feet in front of him sat the man that had orchestrated all the affairs of the past few days.

“Tyrant I am disappointed in your performance. I bought you back from the grave, sent Firelord and Morg into your service, enlisted the High Evolutionary as your ally, and kidnapped the Machine Man as your slave. Yet, you still managed to fail in what I wanted you to accomplish. Disappointed indeed.”

Saying nothing was all the former Herald could do. He had failed and he knew it. The human woman had been the cause of it all. He may have beaten her in the end, but she had truly been a challenge. Her power gave him reason to pause. What on Earth could have given this woman so much power? The whole time he fought against her he felt a pervading evil. A deep, ancient evil.

“Still perhaps I had some fault in this. Restoring the Moon Gods to their former glory was a mistake. And enhancing Machine Man was another one. He will prove to be a

threat to my future plans. I had hoped everything would play out to my advantage, but you did do one thing right at least.”

The eyes of Tyrant shot up at that comment. Perhaps if the leader could find something right in all that had happened he would be given a second chance. A second chance against the woman who had caused him such grief and shame.

“The Avengers are greatly weakened and their powers exhausted. I can take advantage of this. Your services are no longer needed Tyrant. You are free to go.”

Tyrant rose up from his seat and looked upon the leader. For as much as he wanted revenge the alien wanted to no longer be under the service of this Titan. Raw hate existed under those eyes and that wrinkly exterior.

Thank you Thanos. I shall take my leave.

Author's Notes

Oh man this story was where the bat finally connected with the ball for me on Avengers! It was big, had those huge fight scenes, played up a lot of cosmic guys who haven't had much action at M2K, and set up my next big story. Trust me when I say this Thanos story is going to have impact. It will be just as big if not bigger than “Cosmic Games”.

My goal is to make M2K's Avengers full of the most action and big ass stories than any other Avengers title out there. A lofty goal of course, but high goals give me something to work towards. Hopefully “Cosmic Games” was a step in the right direction.

Apokolips

The fiery, burning planet has been home to darkness and destruction for many millennia. Imagine the worst possible place you could ever live multiplied by ten. Then throw in your worst nightmares for good measure. Now you have the planet that so many lowly and empty people call their home. Fire erupts from this planet like water flows down a canyon.

Darkseid was the ruler of this planet and he couldn't be any prouder.

But the man that had come to see him could care less how proud Darkseid was. For this man was a conqueror and like all conquerors he had a purpose. He would appease his lover and he needed the ruler of Apokolips to do it. Of course starting off with a compliment couldn't do any harm.

“Quite the lovely place you control here.”

“Step out from the shadows Thanos. I was wondering when you would make yourself known,” Darkseid said as he sat on his throne. The bulky Thanos moved out from behind the throne and smiled wickedly. The Mad Titan had barely heard Darkseid's voice over the raging fires of the planet, but luckily Thanos had the skill of reading lips.

“I was only waiting for you to stop staring off aimlessly. You and I are both men of power Darkseid. We know what we desire and we let none stand in our path!” Thanos proclaimed. The Eternal had hopes to motivate Darkseid to his cause.

“And what I want is to finish the contest you and I started on Earth! I nearly finished you off and sent your pathetic hide to the grave. I want the chance to do so again,” Darkseid smiled as he rose from his throne his eyes beginning to glow with Omega energy.

“The Anti-Life Equation. Is that not what you want? Is it not your life's pursuit?” Thanos asked quickly before Darkseid could assault him. The harbinger of Death was hardly afraid of the Lord of Apokolips, but his plans did not call for a fight between the two of them.

“And what would you know of it Thanos?” Darkseid asked suddenly stopping his attack. This puny insect had caught his attention.

“There is one in my dimension who can grant us both what we most desire and she is easily captured,” Thanos replied.

“And who would this woman be?”

Thanos laughed, “I’m positive you have not heard of her, but the beauty’s name is the Scarlet Witch.”

“And just how will she give me what I desire Thanos?”

“Imagine this Darkseid. That woman controls all of probability itself. What’s the chance the Anti-Life Equation will come to you in a dream? What’s the chance it’ll end up being engraved in your throne one day?” Thanos asked knowing that he had hooked in Darkseid.

“I’m going on good faith that you’re not lying to me fool, but if you are I’ll lay your flesh out in strips for my people to feast upon,” Darkseid warned.

“Of course. Now let us begin the conquest of a thousand universes...ally,” Thanos said with a deep grin. Things were being set in motion. The plans were beginning to get set in motion. And as the wheels turned the Titan could see the dozens that would be ground in-between them.

Hala

It had once been a proud planet and the home of a mighty race. Now they had been laid low. Their own ruler had betrayed them in the name of evolution. Yet, they followed him nonetheless. Supreme Intelligence, the traitor, would see his people bought high again once more. The actions of the Supreme Intelligence always seemed contradicting, but that was his way. He destroyed and then rebuilt. None could explain the way his immense mind worked.

Why have you come before my presence? The likes of you are not welcome here on glorious Hala!

I have come here for one reason Supreme Intelligence. I have come to warn you of the Mad Titan’s plan!

Do you think me concerned with the affairs of Thanos? If I am correct you were under his thumb until recently. Isn't that right Tyrant?

The face of Tyrant scrunched up at the Supremor's comment. He couldn't help, but to become angered. The arrogance of this ruler was amazing. His empire lay in ruin, but he still managed to be cold and callous to all who approached him. If Thanos had been smart he would have leveled the Kree before trying to come to Earth, but Tyrant was simply in denial. He didn't want to admit the fact that Thanos had set him up. The Mad Titan had wanted him to fail, but the Tyrant couldn't figure out why.

Do my words offend you Tyrant? Then you won't like to know that I don't care. Say what you must say and go. Pawns are frequently pieces I don't enjoy to look at.

You speak harshly now, but you will thank me for this information. Thanos has a new ally in the alien conqueror Darkseid. He comes from the other world that we all had to struggle against only a few years ago.

And why should this Darkseid concern me? The Supreme Intelligence fears no one!

Because this Darkseid will ensure that this universe and a thousand more all come to an end. The only thing that stands in their way are the Avengers and with the forces they already have assembled I'm afraid the Earthers stand no chance.

They defeated you.

Tyrant hated the smile that crawled across the Kree ruler's face. He wanted to blow that big head to a thousand green bloody pieces. While a tremendous fighter, Tyrant was no fool. If anyone could stop Thanos and his ilk it was Supreme Intelligence. He couldn't afford to forget that fact. No matter how much it pained him to admit it.

Indeed they defeated me, but I did not have the forces at my back that Thanos does. Even you must recognize this Supremor. Do not sit idle.

I will consider your words Tyrant. Now leave my presence.

Ronan had stood outside the Supreme Intelligence chambers for almost an hour now. It had been two hours since Tyrant had left those very same chambers. What could he

have said that disturbed the Supremor so much? Ronan had a feeling he was about to find out as the large silver doors split open.

Come to me Ronan. We have much to discuss.

The Accuser quickly obeyed his master and made his way along the purple rug made of the finest animal hairs that lead to the Supremor. Stopping a few feet in front of the Kree ruler he bowed down on one knee and held his head low.

“What is your will master?” Ronan asked never once looking up.

Thanos plans to move against the entire universe. We must put a stop to his plans.

“How will we do this master?” Ronan asked.

Take our army of new Accusers. Go to Earth and warn the Avengers.

Ronan looked up for the first time, “But sire all of Hala will be left defenseless.”

The Supreme Intelligence chuckled loud enough to be heard throughout of the whole of the newly rebuilt capital city.

There is more to Hala than you know my loyal Accuser. Now do as I command. Bring the Accusers to Earth.

Rising up from the ground Ronan the Accuser bowed and said, “I live to serve your will Supreme Intelligence.”

Ronan had more than one reason for not wanting to bring the Accusers to Earth. Not only did he not want to leave Hala without defenses, but also he was also wary of this new Accuser army. They were born of the DNA of Mutants and Kree. When Deathbird had given the Supreme Intelligence the DNA of the many X-Men who had visited her Empire the Supremor used the information to create a new army of Accusers...one which Ronan was charged to lead. The only problem the stalwart of the Kree had with that was the Supreme Intelligence saw the future of the Kree in these new Accusers. Where did that leave the rest of his people?

“Man, you could have told me I was going here instead of the Avengers Mansion!” Karma yelled angrily as Crystal walked up the hallway to meet her.

“I’m sorry Karma, but I couldn’t have Firelord and Morg following you. I needed to throw them off and I know you would be safe here. Trust me. My brother-in-law has never lost a fight,” Crystal assured.

“Yea like I haven’t heard that before,” Karma laughed taking Crystal’s comment with very little seriousness.

“I’m sure you have, but few people actually mean it,” Crystal said with all seriousness.

“Come on now stop playing. I know somebody had to have beat him,” Karma said beginning to doubt her own stance. Maybe Crystal was right.

“I kid you not. He hasn’t been defeated...once,” Crystal replied.

“Okayyy! This is definitely a place I want to get away from then, cuz knowing me, I’ll make the big guy mad,” Karma laughed a little nervous of the thought of being under the care of someone who had never been defeated.

“I understand. We have a plane waiting for you. Take it wherever you want to go and leave it there. My people will arrive and take it back here,” Crystal explained pointing to where the plane could be found.

“Thanks! I appreciate you and Thor coming in there and saving me. Give the guy my love the next time you see him,” Karma said shaking Crystal’s hand and walking down the hall.

“Will do,” Crystal promised as Karma vanished out of view. Though it might be a few days before she did so. The Inhuman Royal was resting in Attilan to recover from her injuries in the battle with Firelord. Plus she needed to spend more time with Luna. She hated the thought of her daughter growing up with her hardly ever being around.

Karma was surprised. This plane was completely automatic. All she had to do was tell it where to go and off it went.

“Man that was hell,” Karma said thinking back to Morg and Firelord chasing her down. Without Thor and Crystal showing up when they did she would definitely be a

goner. Where the hell were the X-Men when you needed them? You would think they would keep tabs on old friends.

“Don’t blame them. They’re lives are upside down at the moment,” Karma scolded herself. Rubbing her hands across her face the Vietnamese woman took a deep soothing breath. She just needed to cool down and take a breather. Shock was still in her system at the pure carnage Firelord and Morg had caused. And one question bugged Karma at the back of her mind. What if one day those two came back to finish what they had started?

“Turn around slowly. You’ll be coming with us,” a brutish voice called out from behind Karma.

Damn it! Damn it! Why do these bozos keep following me?

Turning around slowly Karma gasped. In front of her was a large man that looked very much like a Cro-Magnum on steroids. Surrounding him were green armored cyborgs with skin paler than any gray she had ever seen before. Their eyes all glowed a piercing red.

“Who the hell are you?” Karma asked.

“My name is Cole. These are Parademons. You’re coming with us!” Cole ordered as he and the other occupants of the plane all vanished.

The aircraft just continued on its course totally unaware of what had happened.

Avengers Mansion

“Hey Nicole! How’s life been treating you?” Scarlet Witch asked as she met Binary at the Mansion door. The two embraced for quite a bit before letting go.

“Pretty decent. Christmas wasn’t too bad. Boy, am I glad you came out here to meet me. I was sure as nothing that the Mansion defense systems were going to attack me,” Binary laughed.

“I would have had to beat Neal down if they did,” Wanda said referring to the Mansion’s new technician.

“So Crystal was really beat up that bad huh?” Nicole asked, her voice growing a little with concern.

Scarlet Witch shook her head, “She got a little bruised up but she managed to hold her own against Firelord. An impressive feat, I must say.”

“Not as impressive as you whupping that big blue guy around. I saw it all over the news after it happened,” Binary smiled giving Wanda a high five.

“We girls do what we can,” Scarlet Witch replied with a smile.

“I hear that. So we got any action headed our way?” Binary asked nudging Wanda in the side a bit.

“Hopefully not,” Scarlet Witch sighed.

New Chandilar

Gladiator stood before the large monitor that held the image of the Supreme Intelligence on it. The Emperor of the Shi’ar had no idea why the Kree ruler was calling him, but it had his interest piqued. He would at least hear what Supreme Intelligence had to say.

Greetings, Gladiator! I have news of the most urgent nature to tell you of. The Mad Titan seeks to destroy us all.

“Thanos has long been a nuisance in the side of the universe. Tell me of the fiend’s new plan,” Gladiator said as he listened intently to the details.

Far away stood the Imperial Guard, and though they could see that their Emperor was conversing with the Supreme Intelligence they couldn’t hear about what. Gladiator had made sure to make his conference room sound proof.

“What do you think the Supreme Intelligence wants?” Hussar asked playing with her neuro whip.

“Who knows? That floating head has always been a pain,” Smasher commented.

“I hope Gladiator knows what he’s doing. The Supreme Intelligence is quite the devious one,” Earthquake brooded not wanting his people to be manipulated into something that couldn’t get out of. For all Gladiator was, he still wasn’t a Lilandra in Earthquake’s mind.

“Indeed. The Supremor is skilled at weaving lies into truths and truths into lies. He could make a hardcore criminal save a baby,” Magique said.

“Trust Gladiator. He is far more skilled in the art of politics than you think. Remember, he’s observed two rulers at the game. Kallark has learned plenty from them,” Oracle reminded.

“Indeed I have,” Gladiator said, walking down the stairs that were in front of his throne. Looking over his Imperial Guard, he said with a smile, “We have someone that needs to be caught. The Imperial Guard has been put up for this mission.”

“Are you sure we can trust the Supreme Intelligence?” Magique asked, hoping that the Shi’ar weren’t being reduced to bit players.

Gladiator’s face turned somber, “We have no choice but to trust the Supremor. What Thanos has planned could spell the end of everything!”

“Thanos?” Oracle asked confused.

“I’ll explain on the way. Right now we have to get moving. Time is of the essence,” Gladiator replied.

Attilan

Crystal, the mistress of nature. Only a few short months ago this woman was a wreck. Her husband had cheated on her with Rogue and she subsequently annulled their marriage. She was at odds with Scarlet Witch over Pietro, though in part due to the manipulation of Apollo. Now, though, she was a fountain of confidence. Finding love in Exodus and training under Sersi had done wonders for her powers. It allowed her to stand against Firelord and it would allow her to stand against whatever other challenges decided to head her way.

Crystal was moving to the room where Luna was playing and waiting for her when Karnak tapped her on the shoulder from behind. Crystal jumped back, surprised.

“I’m sorry to have scared you, Crystal. I just wanted to inform you that Karma’s plane landed.”

“Good. I hope she can move past all this mess. Thanks for the update,” Crystal said as she walked into the room where Luna was reading a book.

“What’s that darling?” Crystal asked bending down to look at the book. On the front of it the cover read Magic for Beginners.

“It’s a magic book, Mommy. I want to be just like Auntie Wanda when I grow up,” Luna said with an innocent smile.

“I’m sure Auntie Wanda would be happy to hear that,” Crystal replied returning the smile. Though in truth she couldn’t be angrier. She didn’t want Luna absorbed into anything having to do with heroics. She wanted Luna to be a doctor or a singer or maybe even the next Oprah. Never, though, did she want her precious child to be an Avenger or a hero. There was too much risk in that path. Too much hurt.

Space

Thanos the Mad Titan made his way down the oblong hallway to the red door that lead to the area where his army was being forged. The army was being formed because of the carelessness of the Avengers. They were going to pay for their quick-handed work and would always remember that they had been the cause of their own destruction. The thought made euphoria wash over Thanos.

Coming up on the door, Thanos pressed his palm on a green slab. A blue light ran down the slab, analyzing the hand of the Mad Titan. With a wheezing the door split open, confirming that Thanos had been allowed access. Stepping into the room he saw hundreds upon hundreds of gas filled tubular chambers. It was like seeing a bunch of adult sized syringes lined up in neat rows.

Each colossal step signified the power and command that Thanos held. It would make most men quiver, but Taras Vol had heard these same steps many times. He had been in the employ of Thanos for quite some time.

“Hello, Lemurian. How goes work on my army?” Thanos asked looking out into the vastness of the glass chambers. All of them were bleeping a variety of colors, making for quite the light show.

“Your army grows strong, my lord. The Binary clones should be ready very soon. In fact within a matter of a day or two,” Taras Vol reported. He had once been a renowned geneticist in the ancient Lemurian civilization. When his people fell he fled to the stars with one of his creations. Ever since he had been in hiding and bringing life to dead worlds. It was his way of keeping the memory of his people alive. That was until Thanos found him. Now Taras Vol had real purpose again. His skills in the

genetics were being put to use. Valuable use, for Taras Vol was assured a place in the new universal order now.

“Excellent. Soon my might will spread throughout the universe like an epidemic. All will know, fear, and worship the name Thanos. For I will hold their very lives in my hands,” Thanos smiled clutching his fist together tightly.

Bolivia

The metallic ship landed on the ground lightly with the grace of a landing bird. Suddenly like a horde of locusts Ronan and his Accusers came out of the aircraft. Looking around Ronan looked livid, “This was not the place we were supposed to land! Those astronomers aren’t worth a damn!”

“Calm yourself, Kree. You have more important things to worry about!” Electryon yelled as he descended from the ground. Ronan looked at the man with purple and gold armor in disgust. Whoever this person was he didn’t have time to waste on him.

“Just because you carry a larger hammer than myself, don’t believe yourself to be more powerful,” Ronan warned referring to his Universal Weapon and Electryon’s much larger golden mallet.

“Oh, but he is more powerful, Kree scum!” a feminine voice assured. Ronan turned to see a woman scantily clad in red clothing. Her boots came up past her thighs and her gloves past her elbows. Just about everything else was exposed though.

“What sort of treachery is this?” Ronan yelled as he saw four more people move out from behind the trees and vines.

“It’s the kind of treachery that gets you killed,” Electryon yelled as he slammed his hammer into Ronan’s face and sent him flying across the sky and into a large tree. The plant split in half and went crashing in two directions.

One of the Accusers teleported behind Electryon and slammed him in the neck with both of his fists. The Eternal went crashing into the ground and a plume of smoke followed after his impact. The Accuser that attacked him had been created off the DNA of Nightcrawler, provided to the Supreme Intelligence by Deathbird.

Astarte saw her teammate fall from the sky and was distressed. She hoped that Thanos hadn’t underestimated the power of Ronan and his Accusers.

“Turn and face me, woman!” an Accuser yelled

“You actually believe yourself a worthy challenge to me? How sad,” Astarte said before flipping into the air and firing cosmic energy balls from her feet. The Accuser gracefully dodged all the attacks and leaped into the air, wrapping both of his hands around the woman’s neck.

“Fight my warriors! Send these infidels to the grave!” Ronan commanded slamming his hammer in the middle of Electryon’s face. The Eternal fell back into the ground, leaving a crater beneath him.

Space

MODAM was a woman of terrible power and an even stronger desire to be in control. Thanos saw that and so offered her the opportunity, along with a couple of other superhumans, to be in control of the very universe. All they had to do was follow Thanos and his ally’s orders until their plans came to fruition. The time for that was soon approaching and MODAM’s role in this plot was about to unfold.

Cole walked into the dome shaped room, carrying a woman with purple hair over his shoulder. It was the mutant known as Karma. Her abilities to take over the minds of others would soon prove to be quite profitable to Thanos and the others, but detrimental to the planet. The creation of AIM could honestly care less.

“Will this process be beginning anytime today?” MODAM asked, annoyed as she hovered above the immortal Neanderthal, Cole.

“Be quiet, big head woman. I have little woman. You can do big show soon,” Cole said as he walked over to the machine that Karma was going to be hooked up to. It looked like a carrot that was hollowed out, but it would enhance Xi’an’s abilities to a point that would be useful to them.

“Are you ready?” Darkseid asked, looking at MODAM. He had been quiet during the whole exchange between Cole and the floating head, but now things needed to get in motion. The Lord of Apokolips could barely fathom where Thanos had gathered these bumbling fools, but you got help where you could find it.

“Of course I’m ready, Darkseid. My mind is prepared,” MODAM said confidently as she floated back into the giant blue bubble that was connected to the silver carrot machine that Karma had been placed in.

Darkseid looked to one of his Parademons and nodded. The machine moved forward and pulled down a red lever beside the silver device. MODAM's bubble began to spin around faster and faster till the woman was a blur and gray smoke filled the chamber that held the young mutant.

The Lord of Apokolips smiled. The two devices the ladies were in would increase and link both of their powers. MODAM would in be in charge of the joint power and with it she would attack the minds of Earth, inciting globe wide riots. Darkseid had already chosen the first cities that would erupt in violence. Mexico City, Paris, Moscow, and Dublin would be in flames before the night was over, and the thought of hate raining on the cities made Darkseid smile.

“Things are in motion, children. Some will seek to stop us, but they cannot. Now, if Thanos can keep his end of our bargain, then all will come to darkness. Such beauty none of you can fathom,” Darkseid said as he looked out into the eternal sea of black that was space.

Bolivia

Ronan looked up and smiled at the coming ship. He recognized it and knew that his Accusers would soon begin to win this battle. The Inhuman man, Skybreaker, had taken the air out of most of his Accuser's lungs, rendering them unconscious. Ronan had almost begun to think he would have to fight this battle on his own. If his old warriors had been by his side things would be different, but the Supremor demanded these new Accusers have their mettle tested in battle. So far they had proven to be less than effective.

As the ship landed, the Avengers made themselves known to all present. They were legends and those who were admired always gained the attention of others.

Thor, the God of Thunder. The leader of the Avengers and heir to Asgard. His flowing blonde hair and clean-shaven face spoke of a simultaneous beauty and ferocity. At his side hung the mighty weapon Mjolnir, which had met the faces of many foes. Count Nefaria, Thanos, and Morg, to name a few. The power of this Asgardian was unquestioned and you fought him knowing that no battle with him could ever be an easy one.

Scarlet Witch, the lady of probability. If Thor was the mightiest of the Avengers, Wanda held the most potential. As of late her powers had been growing, causing her to transform into another form that was possessed of an awful power. It was a power

that had saved the Avengers on many occasions. Against the Exemplars, Satana, and Tyrant were all times Wanda's newfound strength had saved the day.

Jack-of-Hearts was the most controlled of the Avengers. His power could burst out of control at any time and cause extensive damage. Jack's Zero Energy was both his blessing and curse. Being possessed of such great power made Jack always on his guard, forcing him to constantly concentrate on controlling his tremendous strength. Such strong internal control often made Jack have less external control, and he had to compensate in some way for his unbalanced life. Nonetheless, he was a strong Avenger and would one day prove his worth.

Photon was the most level headed of the Avengers. Monica had been a cop, a job that required the ability to remain calm in dangerous situations. She was a natural for the Avengers and it showed. Rambeau had demonstrated great ability in the fights against Yamu and Tyrant. Though not being the victor in any of those battles, she had proven a deciding factor in helping the war to be won. Photon wasn't an Avenger that sought the spotlight and she knew what needed to be done. Seeing Ronan, though, made her wonder just who she should be fighting in this conflict.

Quasar, the former Protector of the Universe. He had relinquished his status to Genis-Vell, Captain Marvel, under circumstances not yet revealed to his teammates. Having a title, however, wasn't what made Wendell Vaughn the hero he was. It was his drive and passion for the preservation of life. Wendell would always be a Universal Protector whether he had the title or not.

Binary had been called in to replace Crystal, but Nicole had proven herself to be a worthy Avenger before. Once she had been a villain fighting alongside Diablo in the service of Zeneo Tech. She changed her ways, though, and became one of Earth's Mightiest. Now she was going to prove herself still worthy of the title.

Machine Man had only recently joined the Avengers after the defeat of Tyrant. Thor had offered him membership and Stack gladly accepted the offer. He felt alien and alone, but being around this collection of champions made him feel somewhat normal again. Machine Man was trying to move back to where he once was, but it was impossible to do so now. Celestial technology ran throughout his body. He could now dream, get angry, feel despair, and most of all love. Machine Man was now a sentient robot in every sense of the word...and it scared him.

These seven Avengers emerged from the Quinjet ready to do battle. And, with one resounding cry, Thor shouted, "AVENGERS ASSEMBLE!"

To Be Continued...

By Brent Lambert

The Shaper of Worlds floated in space towards the dead planet below him. Nothing about the wasteland below him seemed appealing, but that wasn't the point. Perhaps there he could find dreams and ideas. For now for the first time since his very existence the Shaper of Worlds has felt a sense of confusion. Changing reality itself had become mere child's play to the cosmic being for he always knew the reality would change back. Now he had to deal with the dreadful fact whatever he changed *stayed* that way.

As he floated in space contemplating he was blindsided by a red fist from the ruler of the Shi'ar. Emperor Gladiator and his Imperial Guard had arrived for their cargo.

“Why am I attacked?” Shaper of Worlds bellowed as he repositioned himself for the next attack from Gladiator.

“Come with us without question and you won't be hurt,” Oracle explained with her arms folded across her chest trying to look imposing.

“And why should I come with you?” Shaper of Worlds asked narrowing his eyes at the lover of Gladiator. His voice seemed to make the foundations of space itself shake. The ancient creature was not use to being assaulted and especially not by the likes of Shi'ar.

“The Mad Titan, Thanos, plots a scheme on Earth that could destroy us all. Your powers could prove to be quite useful in the battle against his forces. I wouldn't have come all this way if I didn't think the threat serious,” Gladiator said flying to float beside his queen to be. He had no idea how the Shaper of Worlds would react to all of this especially after getting ambushed, but Kallark knew that was the only way to get the Shaper to listen. Otherwise he would have treated them like specks and dust mites.

“Thanos is not worth my time, but I do know that Earth is often the place of universal events. I'll come with you, but only because the boredom of space has taken hold of me,” the Shaper said pretending to not be at all interested in the reason Gladiator had come out this far to meet him.

“Excellent. Then let us make haste for Earth. The Avengers need us!” Gladiator exclaimed as an Apocalypse class Shi'ar cruiser appeared from a wormhole.

“So this paltry ship is our transport?” Shaper of Worlds asked trying to sound unimpressed as possible. He didn’t want any of these lowly beings to think that even for a moment he was going to allow himself to be fooled. No one ever wanted the aid of the Shaper of Worlds for purely altruistic purposes. It never happened.

Bolivia

Machine Man turned his body intangible and went midway through Electryon body. Solidifying all his body, except for the tiny portion that was in Electryon’s body, the android sent a powerful energy blast throughout the whole of the Eternal’s body. Dropping his large golden mallet Electryon fell to the ground as Machine Man once again turned intangible and flew high into the air away from his opponent.

“Have at thee foul scum!” Thor yelled as he slammed Mjolnir into the face of Electryon. The Eternal flew high into the air and went crashing into the rich brown soil of the rainforest.

The Thunder God smiled at hearing the thud of the falling body, but that expression of happiness was quickly cut off as a bright beam struck him in the back. Crying out in pain the son of Asgard hit the ground face first. Floating above him on what looked to be a motorcycle without wheels was the son of Darkseid, Kalibak. Next to him a similar device was his partner in crime, Desaad. To both of their backs was a giant portal commonly referred to as a Boom Tube. Hundreds of Parademons poured out to greet the Avengers and Ronan’s Accusers.

“Cyborgs!” Ronan cried outraged at more combatants entering this fray. It had seemed like they were so close to achieving victory. Though, he should have realized that nothing on Earth was ever easy.

“And that’s not all little man. We got a few more surprises up our sleeves,” Desaad, Darkseid’s chief torturer, hissed as something the Avengers hadn’t ever expected to see again came out of the portal.

“Ahh hell naw!” Binary yelled both shocked and upset as clones of her came out of the portal. She had enough of the last experience involving an army of her look a likes. Though, these clones were hardly perfect. In fact, some were downright gross looking. There clones with four arms, spider heads, tails, and spikes protruding from their bodies.

“Not this again,” Scarlet Witch sighed reliving the experience she had in Shi’ar space involving the clones of Binary. It was when the team had been a little bigger and it had happened before Proctor destroyed the entirety of the Shi’ar Empire.

“Smite these foul ones!” Thor yelled angered as he stood up and flung Mjolnir into the barbaric face of Kalibak. The son of Darkseid cried out in pain and fell to the ground. The mystic hammer hadn’t been enough to knock him off his feet, but it did make him kneel in agony.

Ronan seeing the anger of the Thunder God unleashed his wrath as well upon a nearby clone. Grabbing the woman’s head he snapped it like a twig. Turning around to attack another clone he saw Jack-of-Hearts wrapping a dozen Parademons in a negative energy force field and crunching the mechanical monstrosities...slowly.

“Beware Avenger! All is not what it seems here,” Ronan warned as he grabbed another clone and slammed her head into the ground killing her instantly.

“Pray tell what would that be besides for you,” Jack said snidely as he deflected the star powered blasts of four Binary clones. He knew the reputation of Ronan well and it was far from a good one, though anyone under the thumb of the Supreme Intelligence could hardly be trusted.

“Time is urgent so I will ignore your arrogance. Thanos has a new ally who is name is Darkseid. They’ve come to Earth seeking an Avenger to control not one, but two realities. This information came to my master from Tyrant,” Ronan explained as ripped off the arm of a Parademon and slammed it into the chest of another.

Jack laughed, “Tyrant? You honestly want me to believe you now. In fact I’m almost tempted to turn around and whup your tail!”

Ronan began to grow frustrated, “Think boy! If I wanted you to be fooled why would I use the name of someone you hate to do it? This is no game. The universe is at stake here. Put aside your feelings and listen!”

“Okay fine. Lets say I do believe you. Then who is it that Thanos is after?” Jack-of-Hearts asked when he suddenly heard a defiant scream.

“Her,” Ronan said without the slightest bit of emotion as he pointed to Scarlet Witch who was being drug away by Desaad.

Seeing none of the other Avengers could get to her Jack took off in a fury, negative energy blazing behind him. Plowing through the crowds of Parademons, Accusers,

and clones he was nearly within reach of Wanda. The sadist Desaad had a smile on his face the entire time as a black bubble began to expand out from his body. Pushing himself faster than he had in quite awhile he hit the bubble head on and vanished.

“Damn it,” Ronan yelled as he lifted his Universal Weapon and slammed it on the crown of a Parademon’s head. The result was bloody ooze all over Ronan’s chest and face. In trying to save Scarlet Witch the foolish Contraxian hybrid had allowed himself to be kidnapped as well.

Hala

Golden boots treaded the hall of one of the universe’s vilest and most diabolical creatures. The boots didn’t care though because they were death’s messengers and no matter how fearless and great the creature all things submitted to death. Even in this great and dangerous hall these boots went where they pleased for they belonged to Thanos, the destroyer of worlds and the lover of Death incarnate.

You are quite brave for coming here Thanos or perhaps your love of Death has finally made you decide to come to her early.

Thanos let a dastardly smirk slide across his face, “Inciting anger might work for you other “lesser” foes, but it would do you well to remember exactly who I am.”

I know who you are and you coming here was a grave mistake.

“No! You interfering with my plans was a mistake. Me coming here might just be your salvation,” Thanos answered sharply.

And now I see where Nebula gets her awful strategizing from. If you think to come here and intimidate me your arrogance truly knows no bounds.

As if he hadn’t heard a word Supreme Intelligence said Thanos continued on, “Interfering with me only delays the inevitable. If you don’t stop with your meddling hastily I will make you bleed before all this is done!”

More idle threats! Answer me this Thanos. If I was truly only denying the inevitable why would you feel the need to come and tell me to stop? You’re hardly know for being kind and forgiving.

“I’m trying to save you from a shameful defeat. The great Kree ruler doesn’t want to be known in the annals of history as one of its greatest mistakes.”

Supreme Intelligence fought the urge to wrack Thanos' mind with enough pain to make a planet tremble. Anger was what Thanos wanted to incite. It would give him all the victory he needed. To show anger was to show weakness.

Leave my abode Thanos and turn back to your pathetic scheming. And as my soldiers march across your corpse remember to tell Death who bought you to her.

Bolivia

Binary blasted a hole through the back of a Parademon as another one jumped on her own backside. White star energy poured from her body and blew the Parademon off of her in pieces.

"Sure blow up easy don't they?" Binary asked Machine Man who was fighting off a group of said cyborgs below her.

"Easy is hardly the word I would use," Machine Man replied as he moved with a speed to match Quicksilver. With great accuracy he dismantled six Parademons in six seconds flat. They all fell to the ground in pieces of flesh and metal.

"Dang homeboy. I'll remember to call you the next time my Momma's car breaks down," Binary said slightly in shock at the display.

Scanning the battlefield Binary saw that Thor was beating Kalibak back with the strength of his hammer and will. Nicole decided to stay out of that fight when she suddenly lost her breath. Skybreaker moved out of nowhere and struck Nicole across the face sending her flying through the air.

Binary tried to focus, but not only was she losing consciousness from lack of breath, but Skybreaker was whirling her around a mid-air tornado. There was no way she would be able to get a decent shot.

Skybreaker smiled smugly at his handiwork when something grabbed his long blue hair and flung him through the air. He quickly saw that his assailant was the former Cosmic Protector, Quasar. Before Skybreaker had a chance to react he was being bombarded by the energy of the Quantum Bands.

The hold Skybreaker had over Binary quickly ended and Nicole moved in to go and help Quasar finish off Skybreaker. She knew Wendell could handle the man well enough on his own, but Binary wanted to get her piece in. A person ambushing her was not something she took well to.

“Retreat!” called the man with the bulging head called Phobius. Boom tubes quickly began to open all across the battlefield. The Parademons and clones jumped through them with great haste. Astarte saved Skybreaker from the wrath of Quasar and Kalibak, Gronk, and Phobius soon followed them.

Electryon tried to escape, but he was pinned to the ground by a light shield created by Photon. There was no way Monica was letting all these jerks escape without giving some type of answers. Very quickly, the Eternal was all that remained of the attack force.

“Looks like we got ourselves someone to interrogate,” Nicole said cracking her knuckles eager to get down to business.

“Raise him up fair Monica! I hath many questions to asketh of this man,” Thor said anger streaming from every word that traveled out of his throat.

Photon obeyed and dropped the former Damocles Foundation associate to the ground. He was soon hoisted into the air by Thor who bellowed, “Whom doth thou serve?”

“I can answer some of your questions and save us some time. He works for Thanos and Darkseid. He stole away Wanda because she can help the both of them rule their respective universes,” Ronan the Accuser informed walking through the crowd of Avengers and Accusers to get to where Thor had his prison held high in the air.

“Why Wanda? What can she do for the foul Thanos?” Thor asked. Electryon remained silent for a few seconds before Mjolnir struck him across the face.

“Don’t make me ask again,” Thor growled.

“Wanda will give Darkseid some equation. Something of great power. That’s all I know,” Electryon muttered trying to hold onto consciousness.

“Where is she being held?” Ronan asked cutting off Thor.

“I don’t know. That wasn’t made known to me. If you had captured Kalibak perhaps you would have your answer, but I guess he was too much for Thor,” Electryon smiled weakly. He knew he had struck a nerve and if he could make Thor lose his cool enough perhaps it might actually help him get away from all of this.

“Why Kalibak?” Thor asked ignoring Electryon’s snide comment. If the life of Wanda and Jack weren’t at stake he would have already dismissed this fool, but love of his friends held his anger in check.

“Kalibak is Darkseid’s son. He knows plenty more than I do, but you being the fool you are captured a minor player in this much larger game. You waste your time here,” Electryon laughed though it was barely audible.

“And why is that?” Ronan asked holding his Uni-Weapon prepared to deliver a blow of his own.

“For even as we speak Parademons begin to attack across the globe. Why do you think one of us stayed behind? It was to keep you distracted if even for a little bit. I had hoped Thor’s anger would have made you all feel some degree of sympathy for me, but I see that approach has failed. So the hard truth must be delivered,” Electryon said his giant yellow mallet flying from across the ground and slamming it in Thor’s face. The Asgardian went flying high into the air and the Eternal vanished feeling a very happy man.

“Damn! We must prepare ourselves for this army of Para... whatever he called them,” Photon said to Ronan as Quasar and Binary flew over to check on Thor.

“Indeed we must, but finding your teammate has to be my main priority. All of Thanos’ plots hinge on him having her,” Ronan replied.

“We need to go back to Avengers Mansion and handle this. It’s not right to stand around here and strategize. We need a centralized location we’re all familiar with. Planning under pressure in unfamiliar surroundings will not do for such a lofty situation,” Machine Man suggested.

“I agree Machine Man, but whatever we do we need to do it quick,” Photon said with a great degree of urgency.

“Indeed. The half-breed won’t be able to protect Wanda for long...if at all,” Ronan added making the mood a little bleaker.

Karma was surprised. This plane was completely automatic. All she had to do was tell it where to go and off it went.

“Man that was hell,” Karma said thinking back to Morg and Firelord chasing her down. Without Thor and Crystal showing up when they did she would definitely be a goner. Where the hell were the X-Men when you needed them? You would think they would keep tabs on old friends.

“Don’t blame them. They’re lives are upside down at the moment,” Karma scolded herself. Rubbing her hands across her face the Vietnamese woman took a deep soothing breath. She just needed to cool down and take a breather. Shock was still in her system at the pure carnage Firelord and Morg had caused. And one question bugged Karma at the back of her mind. What if one day those two came back to finish what they had started?

“Turn around slowly. You’ll be coming with us,” a brutish voice called out from behind Karma.

Damn it! Damn it! Why do these bozos keep following me?

Turning around slowly Karma gasped. In front of her was a large man that looked very much like a Cro-Magnum on steroids. Surrounding him were green armored cyborgs with skin paler than any gray she had ever seen before. Their eyes all glowed a piercing red.

“Who the hell are you?” Karma asked.

“My name is Cole. These are Parademons. You’re coming with us!” Cole ordered as he and the other occupants of the plane all vanished.

The aircraft just continued on its course totally unaware of what had happened.

Space

Jack-of-Hearts flew forward and punched Desaad in the head with enough force to send the spindly framed man back into a bunch of stacked metal poles almost a half mile away. Wanda slumped down to the ground, but Jack caught her in his arms before she hit the floor. Looking around the Contraxian/human hybrid was in shock. Wherever he was at the place was huge. Empty space stretched in all directions for what had to be at least a mile.

“Ahh the knight comes to save the damsel in distress. Question is; who will save him?” a dark, powerful voice echoed through the massive area. Quickly turning around Jack saw himself staring at a man that would give an armada reason to pause.

“If you think you’re getting Wanda you have another thing coming,” Jack said flaring his body up ready for an attack. He wasn’t going to let Wanda be used for whatever purpose these sick pups had in mind.

“What Darkseid wants he gets,” Darkseid smiled moving calmly towards Jack with his hands behind his back. He feared nothing from this two-toned man. Nothing he could offer would pose any threat to the Lord of Apokolips.

“Stay back before I have to hurt you,” Jack warned moving back two steps for every one that his foe took. Despite his brave protestations, Jack-of-Hearts really didn’t feel all too brave at the moment. In fact he was truthfully scared for the first time in years. This man, or whatever you wanted to call it, resonated incredibly evil power.

“Hurt me? Boy you really do think too much of yourself,” Darkseid said firing off an Omega blast. Jack’s shield stood up to the blast, but he was flung up into the roof of the space station and lost his grip on Wanda. Moving down swiftly Jack fired off dozens of his negative energy bolts at Darkseid.

Darkseid stumbled back a bit surprised that the cretin actually had some power behind him. Smiling he said, “Perhaps I won’t kill you so easily after all.”

“Yea like that’ll happen,” Jack replied defiantly dodging the continuous Omega blasts of Darkseid with great aerial skill. Numerous explosions went off around Jack and a piece of debris blindsided him from the left. Jack-of-Hearts went spiraling through the air and slammed into the ground at Darkseid’s feet.

“Oh believe me it will,” Darkseid laughed lifting Jack into the air by his collar and punching him in the stomach. Then he slammed the man back into the floor and slammed his foot across his shoulders. Jack cried out in pain and Darkseid in response flung him high into the air. Slamming into the nearest wall Jack cried out again and before he could make his descent to the ground two red beams struck him in the chest and kept him pinned there.

“You are nothing! And I will spare you because of it!” Darkseid said disgusted as he ceased his attack and let Jack hit the ground with a loud, resounding smack. Walking over to the fallen body Darkseid hefted it up on his shoulder, “Perhaps you can be of some use to me after all.”

Avengers Mansion

“So Tyrant told Supremor all of this?” Quasar asked again just to make sure he had heard Ronan correctly.

“Indeed he did. Tyrant holds a grudge against Thanos for past insults. Now do you understand why it’s so vital for us to find your missing Avenger?” Ronan asked hoping he had finally made his point clear to all the Avengers.

“Yeah I do, but what can we do?” Binary asked feeling a little small in comparison to the enormity of the situation.

Photon walked into the room with a grim expression on her face, “The Parademons have begun to attack Moscow, London, Paris, and Cairo. I have a feeling New York is soon going to be on that list of cities.”

“Obviously. It makes sense to attack the most powerful places in the world. We have a higher priority at the moment though. Wanda must be saved,” Machine Man implored.

“And Jack as well,” Binary added hoping the others hadn’t forgotten about him.

“He is more than likely dead if Darkseid and Thanos have the forces Ronan fears he does,” Machine Man said coldly.

“Jack is more resilient than you would think. Give him some credit!” Quasar yelled a little angered at Machine Man’s assumption of death.

“Either way the robot speaks the truth. The main priority must be to save Wanda. All hinges on her!” Ronan exclaimed.

Just then the alarms of the Mansion went blaring off. All of the Avengers and Accusers stood to attention. A plasma screen monitor came down from the roof above them and showed an image of Binary clones landing on the lawn.

“Looks like we’ve got a problem! Thor you’ve been quiet so far. What do we do?” Binary asked feeling a little weirded out at the sight of her clones yet again.

“I refuse to leave Migard to these monsters! Though Wanda must be found! We shalt split up into two groups. One shalt handle the threat facing Migard and the other shalt save dearest Wanda!” Thor ordered.

“I know a way to get to Wanda, but I’ll need one of your aircraft to get us there,” Ronan said.

“So be it. Photon and myself will go with Ronan and some of your Accusers to find Wanda. The rest of you shalt stay here and fight bravely,” Thor commanded.

Binary laughed, "You always leave us to do the dirty work."

"Good luck Thor. Bring back Wanda!" Quasar said.

"Wanda will be back with us Wendell. I promise," Photon replied not sure if she believed what she was saying, but it felt good to say it nonetheless.

Paris

Parademons came crashing down around the city of love and spread their hate across the people with their laser lances and eye beams. The mindless cyborgs served the will of Darkseid and his will was that of indiscriminate hate. A hate that boiled deep within the souls of all sentient beings and it was a hate that the Parademons were experts at expressing.

Suddenly, from above a loud roar came and a bright light filled the sky. Upon looking up the masses of Parademons and people saw armored blue men fill the sky. Each one carried a hammer in their hand and a wicked smile on their face. It was the Kree Accusers of the Supreme Intelligence. They had arrived to do battle with the Parademons not only in Paris, but across the globe.

Many light years away Supreme Intelligence smiled. His trump card had been pulled and he could only hoped it made Thanos extremely angry.

Issue #33

“Life or No Life – Part Three”

By Brent Lambert

Above the Eiffel Tower an Accuser traded blows with one of the mechanical monstrosities known as Parademons.

“Back, creature!” the Accuser yelled as he slammed his fist into the creature's face, caving it in.

All around the Kree warrior, his brothers battled against the armies of Darkseid...and it was the same all across the world.

Over the Sahara, one Accuser lifted a Parademon high above his body and flung him into the ever-shifting sands, creating a large crater that sent dust-flying high into the air above him. The Accuser had to wipe sand from his teeth before he spat into the air, hoping it would hit the electrified body of the cyborg.

“Kree will never be beaten by rotting bags of oil,” the Accuser said.

Shards of glass flew from the building in Mexico City as a Parademon went flying headfirst into it. The Accuser that had attacked him looked on in disgust at the machine. Two more Parademons tried to attack him from behind, but the Accuser had seen them coming and used a burst of telekinesis to blast them back into the air. He was one of the many new genetically engineered Accusers using the DNA of mutants from Earth that had been obtained by the Shi'ar.

There was a sudden puff of black sulfurous smoke next to the Accuser. As the smoke faded he saw two more of his fellow Accusers.

“What's wrong?”

“We have a problem sir. Along with the Parademons we now have clones of the Earth heroine Binary attacking us,” the teleporting Accuser reported.

“Where are the clones localized the most at?”

“Avengers Mansion, sir.”

Avengers Mansion

“Tell me why we're fighting copies of myself again?” Binary asked as she flew high into the air and wrapped an arm around a Parademon. Creating a low field of energy around her body she incinerated the robot.

Machine Man watched as she burnt the Parademon to a crisp, but he was too focused on one of her clones that were literally flying circles around him getting in shots whenever she could. It was quickly becoming annoying to Machine Man who desired a fast way to put his opponent down.

Four ridged metallic tentacles whipped out from Machine Man's knees and wrapped around the Binary clone. The woman was sent flying down into the ground and the android sent electrical blasts tearing through the body of the duplicate. So many volts were delivered from the tentacles that the Binary clone was fried to a crisp.

“Machine Man! What are you doing?” Quasar asked shocked and disgusted at the brutal killing that his newest teammate had just delivered.

“I'm doing what has to be done. You should be willing to do the same.”

“I'd like to see you try and kill *him*,” Quasar said with dread as he saw a new occupant enter the battle. He stood at the gate of Avengers Mansion and he wore a grim smile. The wrinkly rough skin added to the dark nature of this man.

“Thanos. Why is he here?” Machine Man asked, getting the same feelings as Wendell upon seeing the Mad Titan.

Suddenly, all around the Avengers, the Accusers that had been battling alongside them abruptly stopped fighting and all of their eyes became a deep black. They stood on the ground and in mid-air with slumped shoulders and lifeless eyes.

Thanos' voice boomed across the lawn of Avengers Mansion as he broadcasted, “MODAM really does wonders. Never did I hope to have my own army of Accusers.”

“When shit hits the fan around here, it *really* hits it,” Binary groaned as she prepped herself for an even bigger fight than the one she was involved in before.

Thor stood in the hallway alongside Ronan, Photon, and the few Accusers that had come with them. Their mission here on this ship was simple. It was to rescue Scarlet Witch, Karma, and Jack-of-Hearts before Darkseid used all of them for some diabolical scheme to destroy all of creation.

At the present moment Thor and his band were face to face with Darkseid and Jack-of-Hearts.

“What have you done to him?” Photon asked looking over Jack to make sure he wasn't hurt. She saw no sign of injury so Darkseid must have been holding him against his will in some other way.

“Nothing, my dear. He's perfectly fine. Your friend here has just had a change of heart,” Darkseid smiled.

Thor leaned his head over and whispered in Ronan's ear, “I shalt take Darkseid. Find Wanda.”

“Understood,” Ronan replied.

Thor leapt forward and slammed his hammer into the face of Darkseid. The bulky man flew back into the floor with a thud. Thor was on top of him within moments, whacking Mjolnir across the Lord of Apokolips' face repeatedly.

Right. Left. A blow to the chin. Thor was getting in a good amount of licks until Darkseid reached behind the Thunder God and grabbed his blonde locks. With a tight tug he threw the Thunder God over him and into the roof. Before Thor even had a chance to come down for his descent, Darkseid fired off Omega Beams keeping the leader of the Avengers locked to the roof.

“You will not easily win this battle. I told you once I liked your fire. You still have that fire, but I will destroy it. Count on that,” Darkseid promised.

Avengers Mansion

Quasar wrapped a group of about a dozen Parademons in an energy shield and threw them into the four charging Accusers who were coming at him.

“This is just lovely. We're completely outgunned here and we don't stand a chance of victory at this point,” Wendell exclaimed.

“Tell me about it,” Binary said.

As Binary contemplated her situation she, along with everyone else, heard a large sonic boom. Suddenly standing next to her was the Emperor of the Shi'ar Empire.

“Remember once, you told me that the Shi'ar have never helped Earth. I intend on changing that now,” Gladiator smiled as the Imperial Guard rained down from the sky, armed and ready for battle.

“Guess my big mouth worked in my favor for a change,” Binary replied.

“Perhaps it did,” Gladiator said as he rose to the air, pointed at the direction of Thanos, and yelled, “Hit him now!”

All the super powered members of the Guard rushed towards the Mad Titan. Starbolt was at the fore of the wave of extraterrestrials and unleashed a stream of burning fire at the worshipper of the living embodiment of Death itself. Thanos backed away from the heat as it began to singe his flesh.

“Infidel!” Thanos exclaimed as he blocked the heat with one hand and unleashed his own cosmically powered blast at Starbolt. The energy swept away the Imperial Guardsman's flames as if they were nothing and slammed into the Shi'ar patriot, sending him spinning into the air wildly.

“I think someone needs to cool off,” Quasar smirked as he came up behind Thanos and battered him with a giant fist composed of energy from his Quantum Bands. The behemoth buckled under the weight of the fist and fell face first into the grass. Wendell continued to repeatedly pound the man into the ground until he was blindsided by an Accuser who possessed the abilities of the mutant Storm.

“Don't touch the master!” the Accuser yelled as he bombarded Quasar with bolt after bolt of lightning. Wendell didn't have time enough to concentrate on forming a sufficient defense and so he was left completely vulnerable against the searing attack.

Binary saw what was transpiring with her teammate, but could not come to his aid because she was preoccupied fighting off four Accusers who all were possessed of the powers of Shadowcat. None of her attacks were having any effect against them because they were simply passing through like they had just hit air. Not to mention they were sneaking in punches and kicks whenever they could, throwing Nicole off of her game.

Emperor Gladiator floated above all this destruction and decided it was time for his secret weapon to make its appearance. Then all of this could be over much sooner and he could return to his empire feeling that it was secure. It seemed that with every passing year Earth's problems were becoming the universe's problems. Kallark, while having many friends on this planet, knew something would have to be done about the situation eventually.

{{Shaper, make yourself known. You know what the plan is!}} Gladiator commanded through the glowing red communication device that was attached to the lobe of his ear like an earring. Now was the time for the real power to be displayed.

Thor was flung high into the air and his body crashed against the wall. Blood trickled from above both of his eyes and across his right cheek. The red liquid drained out of the god's mouth like a hose with a hole in it. Bruises ran across his shoulders and breathing was becoming increasingly hard for him.

Determination, however, was still etched in the Thunder God's visage. Mere injuries wouldn't be enough stop him from finishing off Darkseid. Rising to his feet and holding Mjolnir with an arm that felt exhausted, Thor groaned, "Thou hast strength, but your mighty hand lacks courage!"

"I need no courage to crush an insect like you!" Darkseid yelled as he charged with both of his arms spread wide open. Running forward he slammed one arm into the side of Thor's head and delivered a punch to the stomach with the other. Thor was too weak to hold Mjolnir, so it fell to the ground with a thud.

Grabbing Thor's hair, the Lord of Apokolips slammed the god into the ground face first and slung him forward in such a way that Thor's face was grinding against the metal floor for a good ten feet before he came to a screeching stop. The Thunder God's body was no longer moving.

"I no longer feel that fire coming from you, Thor. Where is it now?" Darkseid gloated as he laughed at the broken body of the Asgardian.

All the while, Jack of Hearts had been holding off Ronan and the others to keep them from interfering in his master's battle. Seeing this, Darkseid grinned at the obedience of his new warrior and commanded, "Finish them off!"

"With pleasure," Jack said, preparing to attack when he was suddenly bombarded by a wave of light. He was thrown high into the air, making contact with the roof of the

ship, and came to the ground with a loud crash. Standing next to his broken body was Photon.

“Not this time, Jack,” Photon sighed.

A world away, the Shaper of Worlds made his descent into the atmosphere of Earth. He moved very slowly and the heat of re-entry barely made him flinch. He was, after all, one of the most powerful beings in the universe, but he simply lacked imagination. Someone else had to help him with that. In this case it was Gladiator, and he knew what he was going to have to do to fulfill the ruler's plan.

Upon making his way through the atmosphere, the Shaper of Worlds went to work. Using his immense power, he did what he did best. He changed the world. All across the globe, where mind-controlled Accusers, Binary clones, and Parademons ran amok there were now super powered Aerie there to oppose them. From Mexico City to Paris, the super Shi'ar made their presence known and fought off the dark forces of Thanos and Darkseid.

Feeling the changes he had made pleased the Shaper. Altering worlds was his sustenance. It was what made him whole. After his encounter with Captain Marvel and Quasar, he hadn't been to a world in quite some time.* Things had changed now, though, and he was under the protection of the Shi'ar Imperium. He could only begin to wonder what that held for his future.

(*In an untold story to appear in Avengers Spotlight-Brent)

Binary pounded Thanos with blow after blow in the face. She was doing her best to keep him off balance while Quasar and Starbolt blasted him from behind. If Nicole failed in her attempt, Titan and Oracle were there to move in as the second wave. Either way it went, Thanos wasn't going to get out of this fight unbruised.

“Come on! You're Thanos! You gotta have some more oomph than this!” Binary mocked as she continued to hit the Mad Titan with star powered punches.

“Back, woman!” Thanos yelled as he backhanded Nicole into the air. Her body flew through the sky like a rocket and she landed right into the arms of Machine Man.

“The battle goes poorly,” the artificial man said as Binary slowly shook off the wave of unconsciousness that came from the villain's blow, “and my programming dictates that we shall be overwhelmed in approximately 9.3 minutes.”

“Then it's time to take this fight to the next level,” Quasar replied to his teammate as a wave of golden energy erupted from his Quantum Bands, knocking a platoon of mind-controlled Accusers onto their backsides. Wrapping himself in a shell of solid-light armor, Vaughn - energy sword in hand - jumped to the forefront of the battle, attacking the Titanian demi-god with as much strength as his weary arms could muster.

“I've seen you go this route so many times before, Thanos,” Quasar said as he battered the alien with his light construct, “and you have no idea how sick I am of you. Kree, Shi'ar, cloned warriors...we're the Avengers, not the freaking Jedi!”

“I know not of what you speak,” Thanos replied, a crushing blow from his fist shattering the energy sword in Quasar's hand, “but allow me to state my case for you, Avenger.” With his fingers pulsing from the concentrated cosmic energy that emitted from his body, Thanos dug his digits into the Quantum helmet around the Avenger's head, cracking it in a spider-web design. “I worship Death. My every moment is devoted to her, my every action and my every whim. What Death desires is to see her realm populated, and if that is what she wishes...”

Thanos slammed his hands together, bursting the shell around Quasar's body, the energy feedback causing the hero to cry out in pain. Thanos smiled maliciously.

“If that is what she wishes,” he continued, tossing the spent Avenger to the ground beside him, “then it is my duty - nay, my *pleasure* - to deliver you all to her arms, one screaming soul at a time.”

“We are so boned,” Binary muttered to herself as she charged up with her own form of stellar energy. “Hey, Gladiator!” she yelled, catching the attention of the Shi'ar Majestrix as he casually tossed aside a pathetically overmatched Parademon. “How about a little help with tall, dark, and scary over here?”

With an uncharacteristic smirk on his face, Gladiator hovered in the sky. “You ask for assistance, terran,” he said, his arm outstretched, pointing to the heavens, “and the Aerie deliver.”

Binary and Machine Man both looked skyward, their eyes widening at the magnificent sight before them. Descending from the clouds, their Shi'ar weaponry already blazing forth with righteous justice, were hordes of the genetically engineered

super-warriors of the avian empire. The Shaper of Worlds had been good for his word, the Shi'ar deathbirds easily making short work of the Accusers, Parademons, and Binary clones as they took to battle.

“Oracle,” Gladiator called out to the lavender skinned female a few feet to his side, “if you please?”

With no words to form her reply, the telepathic Imperial Guardsman impossibly found herself in a place of inner calm, despite the maddening war surrounding her. Her legs folded in a sitting position, her body hovering higher and higher into the air, Oracle reached out with her mind, her power traversing an immeasurable distance. The artificial mind of MODAM was nothing to the Shi'ar woman's incredible psionic might, and with a show of pure force ripped away all hold that Thanos' aide had on the Kree warriors that had previously been on the side of justice. With the Accusers now free from the puppet mistress pulling their strings, the deathbirds found their grim work to be even easier than anticipated.

“Again I am defied,” Thanos said as he watched the cacophony of violence that so easily destroyed his plans. With a look of sadness that ill became him, the Titan depressed a barely-visible button on the top of his gauntlet. With a brief flash of light, Thanos was gone, teleported back to whatever point in the universe he had came.

With the Shi'ar deathbirds finishing off the remnants of the Accusers, Binary shot a look of disbelief to her mechanical teammate. With a calm hand positioned near his temple, X-51 displayed what one could possibly conceive as a smile. “I am receiving reports from across the globe,” he said with the digital buzz that accompanied his speech, “the alien forces have been defeated at every place they had attacked. The battle has been won, Nicole Ridley...we are victorious.”

Ronan rarely ever felt desperation, but this situation called for it. He, along with a few others, was locked in combat with one of the mightiest beings he had ever faced. This Darkseid's endurance seemed endless. The concentrated attacks of Photon, himself, and a few of his fellow Accusers didn't even seem to disorient him.

“You feeble nothings!” Darkseid yelled as he grabbed the head of one Accuser and smashed it into the metal floor of the spaceship. The Lord of Apokolips locked his gaze on Ronan next and moved to make his way to him.

“Photon, go and find your teammate. I will fight Darkseid,” Ronan ordered. The Accuser braced himself for the fight that was about to come his way when there was a sudden rumbling throughout the ship that knocked everyone to their feet.

Looking out into one of the giant triangular shaped windows, Ronan saw four Kree cruisers opening fire on Darkseid's vessel. Hope had at last come for Ronan and his band of warriors.

“Who dares attack me!” Darkseid roared, no longer even paying attention to Ronan and the others.

“My people,” Ronan replied slamming a fist into Darkseid's face. Before the Lord of Apokolips had a chance to return the favor, the blue skinned alien was gone, as were the rest of his band.

Slowly, realization came to Darkseid as he knew the true reason for the cruisers attacking his ship. Ronan and the others had been teleported away and had taken the Scarlet Witch along with them.

“AHHH!!!”

That yell of frustration was heard from one end of the ship to the other.

Thanos walked down the hall of the ship, his body already broken and mangled from his fight with the Avengers. Everything had seemed to be going so smoothly and then the Kree ruler had to meddle in affairs that had nothing to do with him. Now waiting down the end of this hall for the Mad Titan was the Lord of Apokolips.

“We need to talk,” Darkseid said, his body hidden by shadows. Only his glowing red eyes made him visible, to a terrifying degree.

“The power will still be ours, my ally,” Thanos said, cutting off Darkseid's speech, “the Avengers languish in throes of false victory. They are too weak to withstand another assault.”

“We are much alike, Thanos,” the stone-faced lord of Apokolips replied, his ocular energy pulsing in an almost soothing display, “but you forget your place. I traversed across dimensions because of you, and I am ashamed at the way I so eagerly jumped at your promises. I know not how you learned of me, or how you learned of Apokolips, but suffice it to say...you will live to tell nary another soul.”

“Do not pursue this avenue,” Thanos warned, taking a cautious step backward despite himself.

“You know much of me,” Darkseid continued, “but what know you of the Omega Effect?”

The villain's pulsing eyes then exploded with crimson energy, twin beams of energy firing from his sockets. Thanos attempted to move out of the way, but found the energy to follow his every moment. In a desperate move, Thanos released a blast of his own cosmic energy, just as the power of the Omega Effect reached him. The resultant explosion rocked the spacecraft, blowing away a sufficient chunk of steel. One part of the area damaged by the explosion was the ship's reactor core, which responded to the blast with a violent eruption of its own energy.

The spacecraft folded in on itself, creating - for lack of a better term - a wormhole in space. With the force of a vacuum, the resultant implosion caused the universe to tremble, and after a ferocious moment of devastation, the worm hole closed.

The ship was gone, with nary a trace left of the villains that had occupied it.

Hala

Taras Vol had been alive since before the fall of Lemuria on Earth. His time in Lemuria had been spent as an expert geneticist. He had been involved in conducting many experiments on primitive man, to see what potential they held within them. Then his people failed in their own survival and he managed to escape by jettisoning himself into space.

There he created a tiny fleet of ships throughout the thousands of years, so he would have places to continue his work. He managed to keep himself relatively obscure from the prying eyes of the universe. It wasn't until Thanos contacted him that Taras found himself wrapped in the ways of the ever changing universe again. Now, here, he was about to be taken into the company of the Supreme Intelligence. One of the most powerful rulers in all of the cosmos.

Accusers were all around him as he marched forward to the chamber where the Intelligence made his home. Nervousness was hardly the word to describe what Taras was feeling at the moment. It was more like a bit of anxiousness mixed in with paranoia, times a thousand.

So this is the Taras Vol who has been such an annoyance to me. Leave us!

At the Supremor's command, all of the Accusers left the chamber, leaving the Lemurian alone with the centuries-old being.

You have great skill, Taras Vol. It is to be admired. I will spare your ancient life if you agree to one thing I ask of you.

The Lemurian knew that the Supreme Intelligence was not a creature who ever gave another the easy way out of a situation. Whatever it was he wanted, it would be costly for Taras, but in truth he had no other choice. Here he was on the Kree home world, all alone and nearly defenseless. He wouldn't survive for long at all if he refused the Supremor.

"I'll do what you ask of me," Taras Vol answered.

You will be the head geneticist of my grand empire. Just as you constructed a great army for Thanos, so shall you begin construction on my people. You will make them greater in the fires of creation. You will do as I command and never can a thought of betrayal stray across your mind.

Taras Vol nodded humbly in reply, as he knew that life had suddenly become a lot more complicated for him.

Avengers Mansion

"I don't trust the Supreme Evolutionary either, but my people have felt great pain. And if the Supreme Evolutionary can prevent that from happening, I will work and fight alongside him, against all odds," Deathbird replied passionately. She had felt the doubts Quasar had felt a hundred times over, but her people needed to be protected from the conflicts of the universe.

Wendell was the only one whose distrust of the Supreme Evolutionary ran deep. The Inhuman woman, Crystal, also had a great disdain for the man. He created the dimension from which the Armageddon Star hailed from. It was a being that nearly destroyed all of the Great Refuge and her people. Nonetheless, there she was in the sub levels of the Mansion after many days of isolation.

Crystal hadn't left Wanda and Karma's side the whole time since she came to the Mansion. She felt responsible for Karma being captured since it happened under her

watch, and she had sent Karma away thinking that she would be safe. Now, though, the Inhuman woman had been called by the Supreme Evolutionary for some conference concerning an item called the Celestial Puzzle.

The Evolutionary had gathered all the Avengers in the place where all major affairs were handled. Exodus was seated next to Crystal, holding her hand tightly. She had come out to his base in New Mexico and summoned him to her side. He couldn't be sure why, honestly, but he trusted Crys. Fusion and Sersi were seated across from the couple, and at the head of the table was Thor. Deathbird and Quasar were seated on opposite sides of the thunder god. Hanging on the walls behind the Avengers leader were Callisto and Gilgamesh.

The Supreme Evolutionary walked forward and placed the Celestial Puzzle on the table. Looking out at the Avengers he called together, he simply declared, "We have to talk."

"What did you learn from Numinus?" Deathbird asked.

"Enough."

"Okay, I think it's time you give us some definite answers here. We've been traveling from dimension to dimension with you and the entire time you've been mysterious and cryptic. We deserve some upfront and positive answers, like right now," Quoi demanded.

"You're right, Sequoia. You all do need answers, and I'm about to give them. For quite some time now, I've been testing the heroes of Earth against threats in case the Celestial Messiah fails in his quest. I implanted the Children of the Dark with the notion to come after Crystal and Sersi. Also it was I who freed Thanos from his prison in the Negative Zone," the Supreme Evolutionary explained, getting a mixture of shocked, surprised, and angered looks from everyone in the room.

"So you mean to tell me that Wanda and Jack are laid up in the infirmary because of you wanting to "test" us. You're a piece of shit," Crystal exclaimed, nearly leaping up out of her seat if it wasn't for Exodus restraining her with his telekinesis.

"How could you do that to us? Have you no shame?" Photon asked, her voice laden with such disgust that some actually felt pity for the Evolutionary for having to endure such a verbal assault.

"There is more, I'm afraid. This Celestial Puzzle will indeed unlock the powers of the Messiah, but it will require great sacrifices."

“You might as well cut the crap and get to the point,” Exodus said.

“There are a few select individuals who must all touch the Puzzle in a certain sequence for it to activate. Sersi, Deathbird, and Fusion are the first who will receive the Puzzle. Then Exodus and Crystal must hold the Puzzle together. This is where the sacrifice comes in,” Supreme Evolutionary explained.

Bennet's heart began to race faster as he anxiously asked, “What do you mean? Explain yourself.”

“I am in possession of the Mankal Rings. The four rings represent different things. The red ring represents Hate, the light blue one is Love, the black one is War, and the white one is Might. Each of them grants the wearer great powers. I have used these rings on occasion. In one instance involving you and Crystal. With the power of the Love Ring, I made you two fall for each other. Now that love must be given up to the Celestial Puzzle,” the Evolutionary replied, feeling yet another wave of emotion sweep across the room.

“You're a monster! How could you do that to us?” Crystal asked, enraged at the thought of all the love she felt for the man sitting next to her being simply a fabrication by some ring.

“The universe will survive at all costs. I had to make hard choices. Now Exodus, I never had any intention of causing you and Crystal pain, but I did what I had to. Now the choice is ultimately yours,” the Supreme Evolutionary said.

Exodus knew the harsh reality before them. The two of them were going to have to give up their love in the name of the universe. At that moment, neither cared about saving the universe, but only preserving the love that was so dear to them. With his telepathic abilities, Exodus opened up a psionic rapport with Crystal, so they could talk with privacy.

<I love you with all my heart, but it's not love that I chose to have. And I just can't live with that. I wouldn't be able to look at you without thinking about how we were manipulated. It's just not a way I can live.>

<Neither can I, Bennet. It hurts like hell having to do this, and I'll make Evolutionary pay for his vicious act one day, but for now we have to go through with this.>

So, slowly, the Puzzle was passed to everyone that it was meant to be passed to until it reached Exodus and Crystal. Staring at each other, the two somberly gripped the glowing golden box and quickly felt their feelings melt away into a pool of cosmic

manipulations. After holding the box for a minute or so, the Celestial Puzzle changed from its golden hue into a blazing blue.

Smiling, the Supreme Evolutionary said, “Now the time has come. Avengers, be ready if the Celestial Messiah and his soon to be formed Celestial Guard fail. It will be up to you to stop the great evil that is before us.”

Outside the room was the Avenger's technician Neal Xhi, who had been listening to the entire conversation and now had all he needed, no longer required to maintain his disguise. Slowly, his yellowish skin morphed into a pale white and his hair became a tangled mess of black. His dirty blue dickie suit turned into a black bodysuit, complete with a cloak.

Holding the disc in his hand that had copies of all the information on the Avengers database, Proctor smiled, “Xorr should be happy with what I've managed to obtain. Very happy.”

Before anyone had time to exit the room that Proctor had been spying on, he was gone. Off to parts unknown.

New Chandilar

Gladiator sat next to his love, Oracle, as they were carried down the streets of the new planet that the Shi'ar had made their official home world. Kallark had to get used to being the one that was carried on the elegantly decorated cart instead of the one that was doing the carrying. He could plainly see that the royal guards carrying him and his lady were struggling under his weight. The sweat pouring down their faces was evidence enough of that. The ruler could easily understand their plight. After all, you don't knock Juggernaut into orbit and battle Thor by being of a light weight.

“You look troubled. What's wrong? This should be a happy day,” Oracle said wrapping her arms around Kallark.

“I'm not yet used to royalty, Sibyl. It feels wrong that I'm the one being lifted up high for all the people to see.”

“Your dilemma is not an unexpected one. For all your life you have done the serving. Having confused feelings is understandable, but don't you think you've earned this? A final reward for all your long years of serving the Aerie. Now the Shi'ar can finally be

one unified people with you ruling us,” Oracle predicted as she squeezed Kallark tighter.

“Perhaps you are right,” Gladiator said as he eyes locked onto the man he had been looking for, the source of the reason why his people were celebrating.

“Starting the party without me, Gladiator? For shame. Is this how you treat all your guests?”

“Ronan, your stay here is a brief one,” Gladiator replied as he pulled himself from Oracle's grip and floated down to the ground to meet Ronan the Accuser.

“Is there not peace between our people, Emperor? Why do you insist on holding grudges?” Ronan asked.

“Peace between our people, but certainly not peace between *us* , Accuser. I hear rumors of the Supremor being angry at your actions in the battle against Thanos and Darkseid. Would that be why a warrior such as yourself has been sent as a peace emissary?” Gladiator prodded as he walked closer to Ronan, until they were only mere feet from each other.

“You shouldn't listen to everything you hear. So are we going to make the peace treaty between the Kree and Shi'ar official, or do you need to have a dozen more parties first?” Ronan asked impatiently, holding back the urge to attack the Shi'ar emperor .

“We'll sign it soon. I have some guests to invite to the ceremony first.”

Apokolips

The halls of this great castle had yearned for their master's return for many days. Finally, their cries were answered as the footsteps of a gargantuan man made their way down the tall and wide halls full of nothing. Just the way the master preferred it to be.

"Lord Darkseid! You have returned! We thought you dead," Kalibak said, running swiftly down the hall to meet his ruler.

"Such thoughts are foolish, my son. I do not kill easily, but this one might," Darkseid said, holding up the unconscious body of Thanos for everyone to see.

"Does that mean Granny Goodness and I get to have some fun?" Kalibak asked.

"More than your fair share," Darkseid sinisterly smiled.

New Chandilar

It was a sight that made the Avengers look on with unyielding disbelief. The Kree and the Shi'ar, two alien races that seemed to be bred for warfare with one another, were in the process of signing a treaty of peace that would be honored by both races. The Shi'ar throne world, still in the process of construction, served as the setting, with Gladiator's own imperial hall used as the place of celebration. At the heart of the procedures sat the Avengers themselves, presidential guests of the Shi'ar, honoring them as heroes of both empires.

"I just can't get over this," Quasar said as he leaned back in his chair, arms crossed against his chest, "these two actually speaking sentences with the word *peace* in the middle. The Shi'ar destroyed most of the Kree galaxy only a few years ago."

"I know, Wendell," the Scarlet Witch responded after a sip of her drink, "I keep expecting a Skrull envoy to show up with gifts at any moment."

"How are you holding up, Wanda?" Photon asked softly, placing a gentle hand on her friend's shoulder. The Witch merely smiled.

"As well as can be expected, Monica," she answered, "even if I'm still unclear as to what that madman wanted with me. And though I appreciate your concern, the one that worries me at the moment is Jack."

The aforementioned Jack of Hearts was moping, his arms resting on the table and his head hung low. "I can't believe how easily I was turned against you all. My mind, my independence, it was all stripped away so easily."

"Trust me, Jack," Crystal said, a hint of sadness in her voice, "none of us have come through this affair unscathed. Even Thor has been silent ever since he recovered from his battle with Darkseid. I have a feeling we're all going to be looking at ourselves in the mirror for a long while, not recognizing who we see in the reflection."

"This is a party, guys," Binary enthused as she downed another alcoholic Shi'ar drink, patting Machine Man on the back as she spoke, "so everybody cheer up. We won,

didn't we? Thanos went off to lick his wounds, two of the most war mongering races in the universe have sobered up and decided to work together...what's the problem?"

"Thou hast not been an Avenger but for a short time, Binary," Thor said grimly, "but knowest thou this: when'er dark times befall our mighty assemblage, the Avengers always fight on...but that dost not mean we not suffer in the process."

All of the heroes fell silent after Thor's cryptic statement, but only one was silent for a reason. Machine Man scanned the signing of the treaty between the two interstellar races with his mechanical senses, and while he humanly wished that good would come of the event, the statistical probabilities could not lie.

With a firm shake of a hand, Ronan and Gladiator had sealed the treaty. But while neither race was fit for war at the moment, every one in the great hall knew that peace...peace was fleeting. But hatred and war?

Those, Aaron Stack knew, were forever.

Next Issue: The Avengers return from space and find a big surprise awaiting them at Avengers Mansion! "New Order Changeth..." kicks off under the pen of the new co-writing team, Thomas (*Ghost Rider*) Deja and Derrick (*Hulk*) Ferguson!

Author Notes

Man this is definitely not how this issue was suppose to have looked. It was originally 15 pages worth of material and had a lot more stuff going on and things fully explained, but I lost every last bit of it. So I had to start over from scratch and I hate writing issues a second time hence why you got this issue before you. I did the best I could, but man it was just too hard trying to write this thing over again. Anyway I'm done. My time with Avengers is over. I had a whole mess of fun with this title and some of my ideas and what not from here are being carried over into my upcoming project AVENGERS: CELESTIAL MESSIAH (and I will make sure to have three copies of each issue lying around for this one). Look out for it! Anyway my time with this title is done and I need to thank some folks who have been nothing but a positive help to me. Chris, Russ, Derrick, Oliva, Logan, Jason, and whoever else I forgot to mention, you guys were great.

Over and out!

-Brent Lambert

Editor Notes

I usually don't like to stick my big nose into the comment sections at the end of other writers' issues, but this time deserved an exception. I want to thank Brent for the time he spent on AVENGERS, and I think he deserves a hand for his long tenure. The boy had lots of ideas, and while some worked much better than others, no one can deny that he poured his heart into writing this series. Kudos to you, Brent, and everybody definitely be on the look out for the upcoming Celestial Messiah mini-series!

Now, since this is Brent's last issue, you may be wondering just who's going to be filling his shoes as the chronicler of Earth's Mightiest Heroes. Well, we've got not one but TWO of Earth's Mightiest *Writers* coming on board as a spectacular co-writing team: none other than Derrick Ferguson and Thomas Deja! Yet another change is in store for the Avengers, and you'll kick yourself in the throat for a month if you miss it!

-Chris Munn