

Metal and Magic

Chapter 9

Harry walked into his hotel room and set his bag of food on the table. A burger and fries had become a staple in his diet as of late. He pulled the curtains back on his balcony window, revealing the night sky and hundreds of lit-up windows. Grabbing the remote, he turned on the TV and began flipping through the channels, trying to find the local news. When he found it, his eyes widened in shock.

“ ... looked like two robots fighting! They tore up the street and wrecked a bunch of cars,” a middle-aged woman said to the cameraman, pointing over her shoulder. In the background, Harry saw quite a bit of destruction. The battle had left a trail of twisted metal and shattered glass in their wake. “Woah!” someone shouted, and when the camera panned over, it showed what appeared to be two missiles flying straight into the air.

“We highly recommend that everyone stay clear of Stark Industries. The streets look like a war zone and ...” the reporter stated, but Harry wasn’t listening by then. He spun in place, a sense of urgency driving him, and disappeared from his hotel room.

He appeared in an empty alley near the Stark Industries building. His nose wrinkled from the sudden smell of stale piss and garbage. With a swift motion, he transformed into a raven, his human body contorting and reshaping until he was a sleek black bird. Harry took off into the air and quickly spotted the carnage on the ground below him. Wrecked cars and trucks littered the street, and several fires burned, casting the scene in an ominous orange light. A loud metallic bang drew his attention away from the disaster zone, and Harry flew higher to investigate.

As he reached the necessary height, Harry spotted a normal-sized man in metallic red and gold armor. He instantly knew this was his idiotic friend. His hunch was immediately confirmed when the faceplate slid upward, revealing Tony’s stupid face. The faceplate immediately snapped shut when a monstrosity large metal hulk landed behind him with a bone-shaking thump. A punch was thrown, and Tony spun through the air and landed roughly ten feet away. He slid to a stop on his feet and attempted a flying punch, but the hulking metal monster quickly wrapped him up in a bear hug. Harry had just dove to step in when flares began flying out of Tony’s suit in every direction. Harry cawed loudly, temporarily blinded by the bright lights. He banked hard and let a wind current carry him higher into the air. He could hear fighting going on below him, but white spots filled his vision, leaving him unable to act.

After a minute or so, his vision began to clear, and he heard a violent explosion from down below. He looked down and saw Tony dangling from a broken skylight, and there was a very bright, bluish light emanating from down in the building. The large, metal hulk turned out to be a suit of armor as well. The front was opened up, and an old bald man was sitting inside. He had his arm stretched out before him and was firing missiles at Tony’s dangling body. This was his time to act.

Harry tucked his wings in and swooped down, directly at the exposed portion. Coming in fast, Harry flipped his bird body, transformed mid-flight, and kicked the man straight in the chest with both feet. He apparated away and reappeared on his feet right between Tony and the other metal monstrosity. "Harry?" Tony asked in confusion.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!" the old man screamed in pain, and the gargantuan suit flailed its arms. He then coughed loudly and gasped for breath. He looked straight at Harry with pure hatred. "You broke my ribs, you little shit!" he shouted with a gruff, pained voice.

"A thousand apologies," Harry chuckled. "I meant to kick you in your big, ugly face."

"ARRRRRGGH!" he growled and pointed his arm directly at Harry. A large missile popped up from his tree-trunk-sized forearm, but Harry was more than ready for it. The Elder Wand appeared in his hand, and as the rocket ignited, Harry casually flicked the wand. The missile broke free of its launcher and tumbled over the side. It exploded against the suit's side, sending it tumbling to its left. The loud clanking and scraping made Harry's eardrums hurt, but the pained scream that followed was like music to him. Unfortunately, the metal suit was back on its feet faster than Harry could blink.

"Now you're going to get it!" the old man snarled, and Harry saw that the right side of his face was pockmarked with shrapnel and caked in blood. The front plate snapped shut, and the man yelled in fury. It lunged forward with both arms outstretched. Harry definitely didn't want those hands getting hold of him. He knew those metal arms would turn him into paste with just the lightest squeeze.

Harry disappeared right before he would have been trampled. He appeared right behind him and swung his wand forward. A golden lasso of light erupted from the tip of the Elder Wand, and he could practically feel the wand vibrating with euphoria. The wand loved battle. It craved it. It was almost an extension of Harry's body, and he barely had to think about what he wanted before the Elder Wand acted on his wishes.

Golden light lit up the entire roof of Stark Industries as the lasso streaked forward. It hit the stumbling suit directly in the back and wrapped itself around its torso. Harry pulled the wand back, tightening the grip on the metal beast's back. As it tightened, the golden light dug into the metal, bending and tearing it and creating a terrible sound. The hulk turned around and blindly swung in his direction, but Harry was too far away for him to make contact. Harry pulled the wand hard while lifting it up. The beast was pulled high into the air, and Harry could hear its synthesized scream as it tumbled head over heels. Harry jerked the wand downward, and the suit slammed into the concrete roof with a deafening bang. Pieces of concrete shot out in every direction, some of them hitting Harry. The metal man sat up and twisted his arm around the golden light. He then pulled with all his might while his arm sparked and smoked from being in contact with Harry's magic.

“Get over here!” he shouted, and Harry’s feet slid across the roof. Harry tugged in the opposite direction, and the arm groaned as the metal stressed. It was starting to glow from the heat being produced. Even as Harry pulled his hardest, the suit was simply too powerful, and he began sliding again. Harry concentrated and gave his wand the slightest flick. A lightning bolt surged through the rope of golden light and struck the arm, causing it to explode. Red-hot shards of steel rained down, and Harry was luckily spared when the tension was cut and he tumbled backward.

He fell on his butt and rolled backward into a standing position, his wand at the ready. “You piece of shit!” the old man cried out and flipped the chest plate up, exposing his head and torso. At the same time, his one good arm swung upward, and an attached mini-gun began spinning. On instinct, Harry twisted his wand and jabbed, conjuring a large shield of magically reinforced metal. With his body completely covered by the shield, Harry winced in pain as the bullets began flying. It sounded like a hundred hammers were beating on the shield every second. Though he couldn’t see the impact of the bullets, he could still see the sparks flying out from all sides, and he could definitely feel the vibration. It seemed to go on forever, and he was too deafened by the constant noise to notice the metal beast slowly making its way over to him.

Metal and Magic

Obadiah Stane kept his gun blazing as he slowly crept over to the annoying little pissant. He coughed roughly, and he felt warm liquid roll down his chin. He knew that wasn’t good. He likely had some internal damage from getting walloped in the chest. He needed to end this fast. His head was pounding, and every breath felt like a knife in the gut. The flash of the tracer rounds were blinding, and he could barely see when he finally reached the large, round piece of metal protecting the young man. ‘How the hell is he doing all this?’ he asked himself. ‘What kind of technology is he using, and how can I get my hands on it?’ He was obviously working for Tony. Had Tony shared some new tech with him? Had he been holding out? A million questions flooded his mind as he cut the gun and grabbed the top of the shield. “Got you!” he declared and pulled the metal shield out of the way. He was met with an empty stretch of roof. No one was there. “What the ...?” he asked, confused.

Suddenly, the metal shield was yanked from his grip and rocketed forward. It slammed right into the front of his mech, and the edge of the shield caught him in the face. Stane cried out as a large gash was sliced into his forehead, and blood began dripping down his face. Then, a very powerful force rammed him straight in the middle of his back. Stane tumbled forward and hit the ground face-first. As he pushed himself up with his one good arm, he heard the gears grinding and felt them slipping. He then felt another violent collision with his back, and his suit began beeping. “Shit,” he hissed. It was the warning alarm. His suit was nearly to the point of being non-functional. He only had one choice. He needed to get the fuck out of there. He pressed a button and activated the thrusters. His chest plate closed, protecting him from what would surely be a rough landing. The thrusters at the bottom of his boots roared to life, and he immediately became airborne.

Metal and Magic

Fire and intense heat burst out from the bottom of his feet, forcing Harry to take a step back. He had to shield his eyes from the blinding light. Slowly, the metal monster began lifting off the ground. Harry narrowed his eyes. "Where do you think you're going, baldie?" he called out.

Harry swung his wand, and an amethyst colored chain of magic flew from the tip of his wand and wrapped around one of the ankles. The iron beast stopped rising, and the thrusters roared even louder. Harry struggled to keep him from flying away, and beads of sweat began rolling down his forehead. "Will you just give it up, runt!" the old man shouted in his robotic voice. His body slowly turned to face Harry, and he began raising his arm.

"Take out the Arc Reactor!" Harry heard Tony shout from behind.

"The what?!" Harry asked loudly over the roar of the thrusters.

"The glowing circle on his chest!" Tony shouted back.

Just as the mini-gun on his arm began spinning, Harry vanished the chain and pointed the Elder Wand straight at the glowing circle. With barely a thought, Harry summoned it straight from his chest while the armored suit began to rise again. The entire circle screeched terribly as the metal tore from its mount. Sparks flew out, and electricity crackled as it was yanked out while the old man shot high into the air. Harry watched as it flew straight up another hundred feet before the thrusters sputtered and died. The hulking armor suddenly stopped rising and slowly began its descent. Head over heels, it tumbled downward, and Harry swore he heard panicked yells as it dropped out of sight. Far below, he heard a loud crash followed by a dozen or so car alarms going off. Harry took a deep breath and wiped the sweat from his forehead. He snatched the glowing circle from the air and examined it. He discovered that the circle was just the outer cover. He flipped it around and pulled out a much smaller device that was glowing pale blue. It had a bundle of wires sticking out of the back. Harry dropped the bulky cover and examined it closely.

"Don't mind me!" Tony called out. "I'm hanging in there!"

Harry snorted and walked over to Tony. When he got there, he saw Tony hanging on for dear life. Below him was a long drop with some kind of large machine radiating light. "You may want to hurry. I don't think I can hold on much longer!" Tony winced.

"Alright ... Hold on," Harry said, getting into a better position. Tony looked down and called out to Pepper.

"We're okay, Pepper! Don't press the button!" he shouted, though it was difficult to hear over the loud noise the large machine was making.

“Press the button?!” Pepper shouted back from below. “But you’ll die!”

“DON’T press the button!” Tony corrected her in panic.

“Okay, Tony! Pressing the button!” she shouted back. It was a true comedy of errors. Instantly, the machine began producing a low-pitched rumble, and a surge of energy raced toward them. Tony looked at Harry with wild eyes.

“If you’re going to do something, you better do it now!” he shouted over the deafening noise. Harry didn’t need to be told twice. He flicked his wand, and Tony’s armored body levitated from the broken skylight. Harry grabbed his wrist, and they vanished just before a pale blue sky beam of energy shot upward and pierced the clouds.

They instantly appeared back in Tony’s house. Harry stumbled while Tony’s inoperable suit made him lose balance. He fell over and crashed right through his insanely expensive coffee table, spreading pieces of wood, metal, and glass across the floor. Harry looked down at Tony, and the older man groaned. “You alright?” Harry asked. First-time apparitions were always tough on the body.

“Do I look alright?” he groaned again while his severely damaged suit sparked in various places.

“About the same as always,” Harry chuckled.

“Help me out of this five-hundred-pound anchor,” he winced while trying to move. “And after that, we need to have a talk.”

Harry sighed. “Yeah, I suppose we do.” Harry flicked his wand, and the damaged suit disappeared from his body. It appeared right in the middle of the living room, hovering in the air. It then dropped loudly to the ground, and a piece shot away from the mangled pile and hit one of his very large windows. It cracked loudly and shattered a second later. Both men flinched from the thunderous sound of shattering glass. Tony shakily got to his feet and looked at the broken window. He then looked at the rest of the mess.

“A perfect end to the day,” he sighed before grabbing his chest. The light in his chest was flickering. Tony tapped it with his fingertip, and the light went out. “This isn’t good.”

“Hey, that kind of looks like my new souvenir,” Harry said, holding up the brightly glowing Arc Reactor in his hand.

“Give me that!” Tony yelled and snatched it from his grip. He quickly took off his shirt and removed the thing in his chest. Harry wrinkled his nose in disgust when he saw a large, metal-plated hole in his chest. It was also dripping goo.

“That smells!”

“So I’ve been told,” Tony dryly retorted as he reached in and grabbed some wires. He then connected the Arc Reactor and slid it into the casing. Once done, he breathed a sigh of relief.

“If you’re done playing with your puss-filled hole ...”

“It’s not puss. It’s an inorganic plasmic discharge ...”

“Yeah, yeah,” Harry responded, waving away his gross explanation.

“So, Harry ... Would you mind telling me exactly what in the hell you are?” Tony asked, crossing his arms.

Metal and Magic

“You’re from a different reality?” Tony skeptically asked. Harry nodded.

“You came here in a portal?” Again, Harry nodded.

“And you can do magic?” Harry sighed.

“I’ve already told you three times. Yes,” Harry reminded him.

“Just making sure,” Tony said as he paced around his partially destroyed living room, rubbing his chin in thought. “I find this all very hard to believe,” he sighed, shaking his head.

“Didn’t you see me doing magic on top of the roof?” Harry asked.

“Possibly ... but I did hit my head a few times, so I might have been hallucinating,” Tony told him, rubbing the side of his aching head.

“Well ... What about this?” Harry said and transformed into a raven right before Tony’s eyes. His eyes grew to the size of saucers as he watched Harry waddle around on the ground. Harry then began flapping his black wings, and he flew up and landed on the top of the couch.

“Harry? Is that really you?” Tony asked in shock, leaning in to get a better look. The bird cawed loudly at him. “Don’t poop on my couch,” he quickly added. Bird Harry turned to the side, lifted his bottom, and began shaking his tail feathers. “STOP!” Tony shouted in panic. Harry immediately transformed back into a human, sitting on top of the couch with his feet on the cushions.

“Relax, idiot,” Harry snorted in amusement.

“This is all real, isn’t it. I haven’t gone crazy?” Tony asked, scratching his head in wonder.

“The crazy part remains to be seen, but yes, this is all real,” Harry answered him.

“So that’s how you were able to find me and bring me back ... with your magic?” Tony correctly deduced.

“Yep,” Harry nodded. “Magic and a bit of detective work.”

“So what kind of other stuff can you do? How did you bring us back to the house in an instant, and why did it feel like I was being sucked through a straw?” Tony asked, eager to hear more.

“I’ll go into a further explanation later, but shouldn’t you try to contact Pepper first? She’s probably already declared you dead and is in the process of transferring your assets to herself.”

“Oh, yeah! Pepper ... I forgot,” Tony remembered and went straight for the house phone.

Metal and Magic

“I am Iron Man.”

The entire crowd went nuts with reporters jumping to their feet and yelling out dozens of questions. Harry rolled his eyes and turned the television off. “Dumbass,” he snorted.

He got up from the bed and stretched with a loud yawn. He then grabbed his bag of salt and vinegar potato chips and enjoyed a midday snack. Tony had stated last night that he would come up with a reasonable and rock-solid explanation for the events of the previous night. Hearing him bumble through the press conference was amusing to watch. Unfortunately, he ended it with a very big bang. Confessing to being a superhero on national TV was something Harry never would have done. ‘Tony’s his own man, and he can do whatever he wants,’ Harry reminded himself as she crunched down on the salty treat.

Still, Harry knew this was going to bring a lot of heat on him. A very big target was now painted on his back, not only from his enemies but from the government as well. He only hoped that Tony was aware of this. Harry grabbed a can of soda and cracked it open.

Roughly half an hour later, his Stark Industries cellphone began ringing. He looked at the caller ID and saw that it was Tony. “Hey, Tony,” Harry greeted the moron.

“Did you see the press conference?” was the first thing he asked.

“I did,” Harry answered.

“Well ... What did you think?”

"I think it's risky and dangerous," he truthfully said, the weight of Tony's decision hanging heavy in the air. He then heard Tony sigh.

"You aren't the only one. I kind of just blurted it out on a whim," he confessed, his voice carrying a hint of vulnerability. Harry chuckled and shook his head. That sounded like something he would do.

"All you can do is prepare for what's to come," Harry told him and took a swig of root beer.

"I suppose," he replied, the tension in the air palpable. Harry heard a lot of talking going on in the background. "Anyway, I've got to go. Meet me at the house tonight. I've got some things I want to discuss."

"I'll be there. Later," Harry confirmed.

"Later," Tony replied, and the line went dead. Harry tossed the phone onto the table and went back to relaxing on the bed.

Later in the afternoon, Harry drove down to Malibu, and when he pulled in, the gate automatically swung open for him. He pulled up to the house and got out. No sooner than he had, Tony met him at the front door. Tony looked tired.

"Long day?" Harry asked as he walked up to him.

"Very long," Tony replied, going back into the house and leaving the door open.

"Where's Pepper?" Harry asked, not seeing the strawberry blonde woman anywhere.

"She's still at the office. As you can imagine, my confession caused a bit of an uproar, and she's trying to smooth things over with the investors," Tony chuckled. "She's less than pleased with me right now."

"I'll bet," Harry said. "So ... What is it that you want to talk about?" Tony led him down into his lab, and Harry saw that he was already designing a new version of his "Iron Man" suit.

"Remember when you said that I should prepare for what's coming?" Tony asked him. Harry nodded. "Well, I thought about that before I even called you."

"That's good. What are you going to do?"

"I was thinking ... You know how you're looking to buy a new home?"

"Yeah. What about it?" Harry asked.

“Why don’t you just move in here for the time being?” Tony asked him. Harry raised an eyebrow.

“Why?” was all Harry could ask.

“A couple of reasons,” Tony stated, tapping his fingers against the workbench. “First, I’d like to study this power you have. It could be very useful for what I’m trying to do, but the main reason is security. You’re right about one thing. My decision to tell everyone is dangerous, and having you around could come in handy. You handled yourself pretty well against Obadiah.”

“I dunno,” Harry answered in a sing-song voice. He wasn’t sure if it was a good idea.

“C’mon!” Tony happily encouraged him. “Think about it. This house is huge, and you don’t even have to pay rent. I’ve got tons of cars you can use, so you can send that disgraced hunk of metal you drive around back to the scrapyard. I’ve got a bunch of crap you can experiment with,” he said, sweeping his arm across the lab to show off the multi-million dollar equipment he had. “Besides, the chicks love a Malibu mansion,” he said, wiggling his eyebrows. “You’ll get more action than you know what to do with!”

“Hmmm,” Harry said, rubbing his chin in thought. “Chicks, huh? ... Alright, I’ll do it! But just as a favor to you,” he added. His decision had nothing to do with the promise of many hot women.

“Awesome!” Tony exclaimed happily and clapped Harry on the shoulder. “I have a feeling this will be the start of a beautiful friendship,” he joked.

Back at Stark Industries, Pepper Potts shuddered, but she didn’t know why.