

# *Captain America*



THE  
KANG  
INFLICTION



BY  
LUKE PORTER

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*The Avengers are down. Kang has set something in motion here in the present, and he is about to jump into the future and reap the benefits. I have one shot at this...*





*I launch myself at Kang, but he has already entered the time stream. I don't know what awaits us in the future, but I need to take him down before we get there.*





*We reach the end of the time portal and my stomach lurches. Kang siezes the moment and gets in one lucky shot. My world starts spinning.*





*My space armor normally has some basic propulsion capabilities, but Kang's blast disabled everything. All I can see is the ground getting closer and closer.*





*I manage to get my shield up just in time. It absorbs most of the impact, and my space armor takes care of the rest. I'll have to thank Tony later for that one.*





*Where is Kang? He should have landed near me, but there's no sign of him. The only thing I can see is a large black building in the distance. Everything else is desert.*





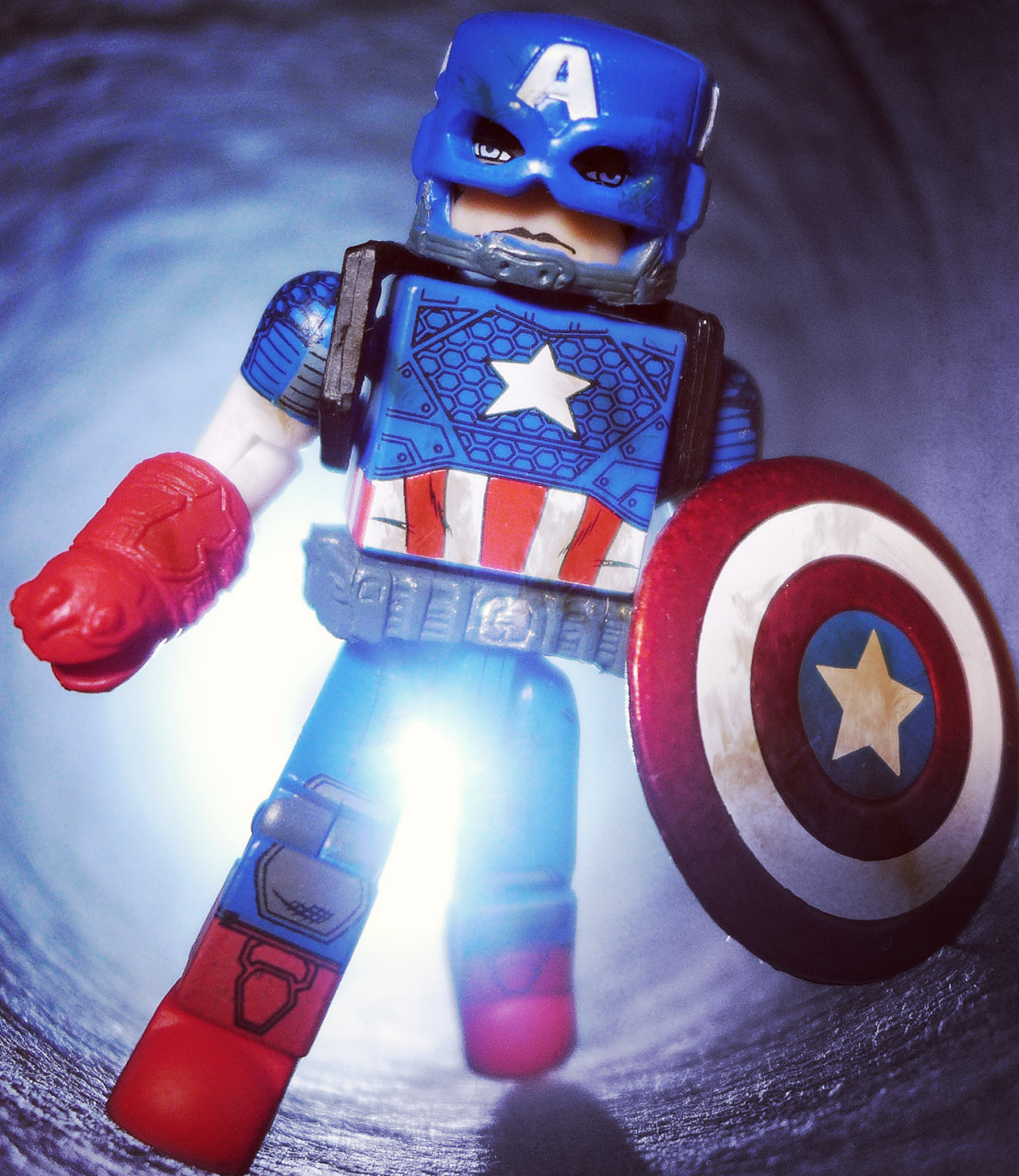
*I leave the damaged armor behind and head towards the black facility. I need to figure out where I am, and what year it is.*





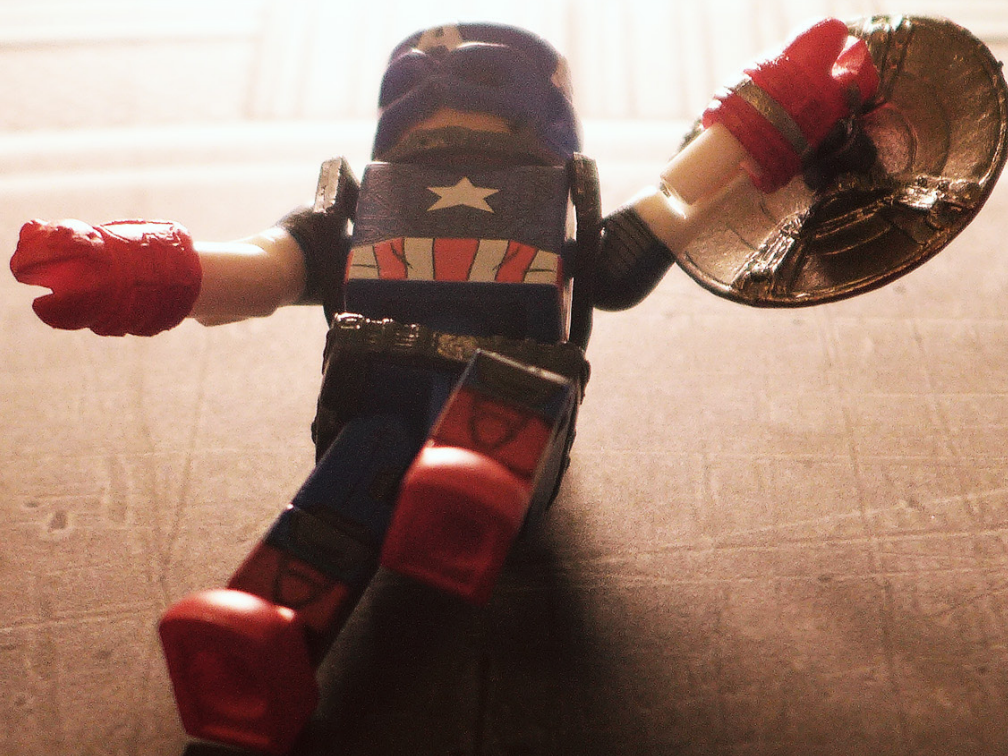
*I take one last look at the desert. Something about it feels very wrong. I am hoping to find some answers inside here.*





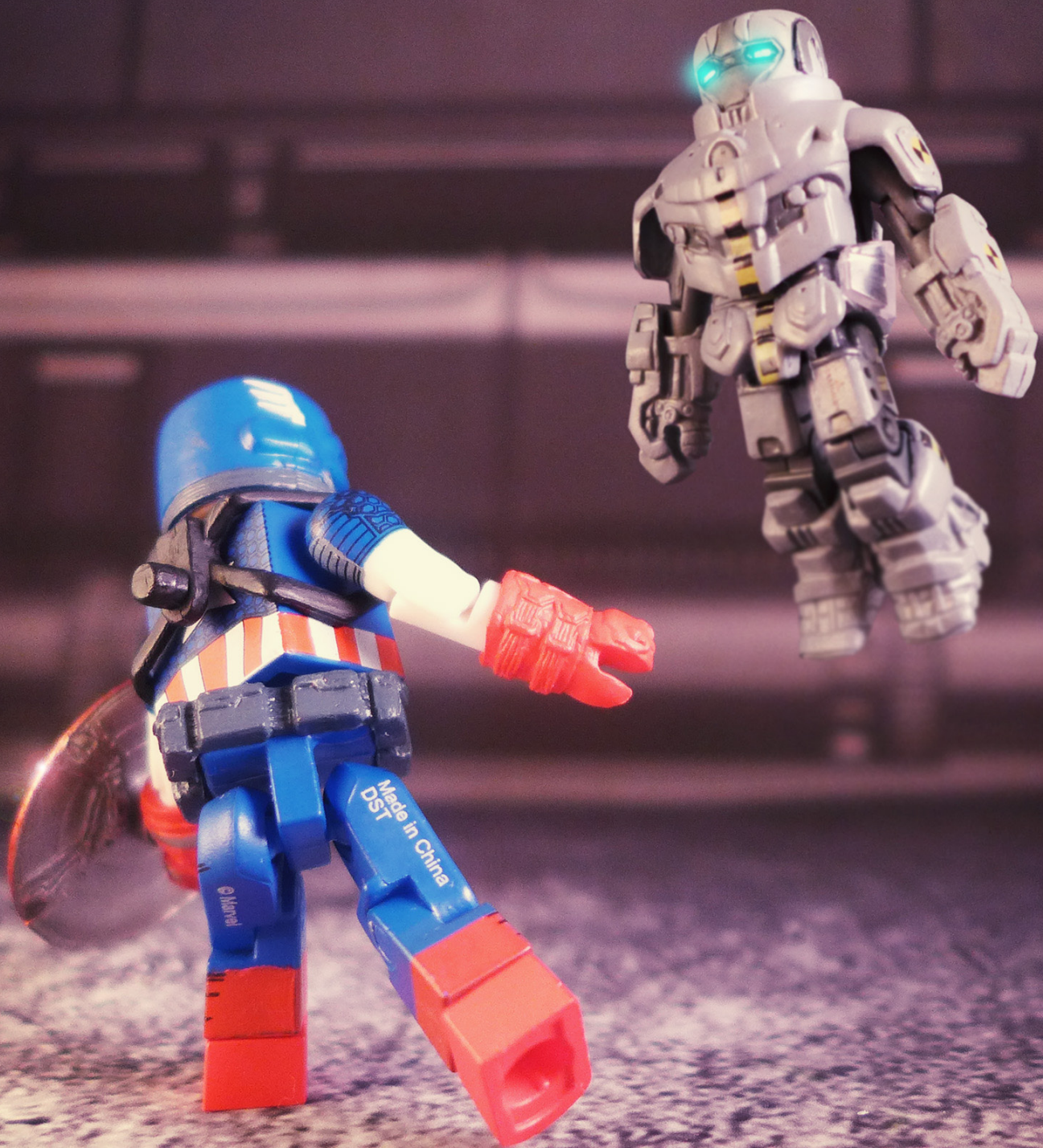
*I decide not to use the front door - if this is a hostile facility I will learn more by staying in the shadows. I find an enormous air vent on the outer wall. I check for motion sensors and head inside.*





*This seems to be some kind of research center, but everything is deathly quiet. I can't see much from the vent openings. I drop down to take a closer look.*





*A security drone finds me almost immediately, warning me to stand down in a dull metallic voice. Doesn't look like Stark tech.*





*I try asking the drone a few questions about this base. It answers me with a laser blast.*





*The stealthy approach was never really my style anyways.*





*Two more drones join the fight. Their blasts hit the generator behind me. This can't be good...*





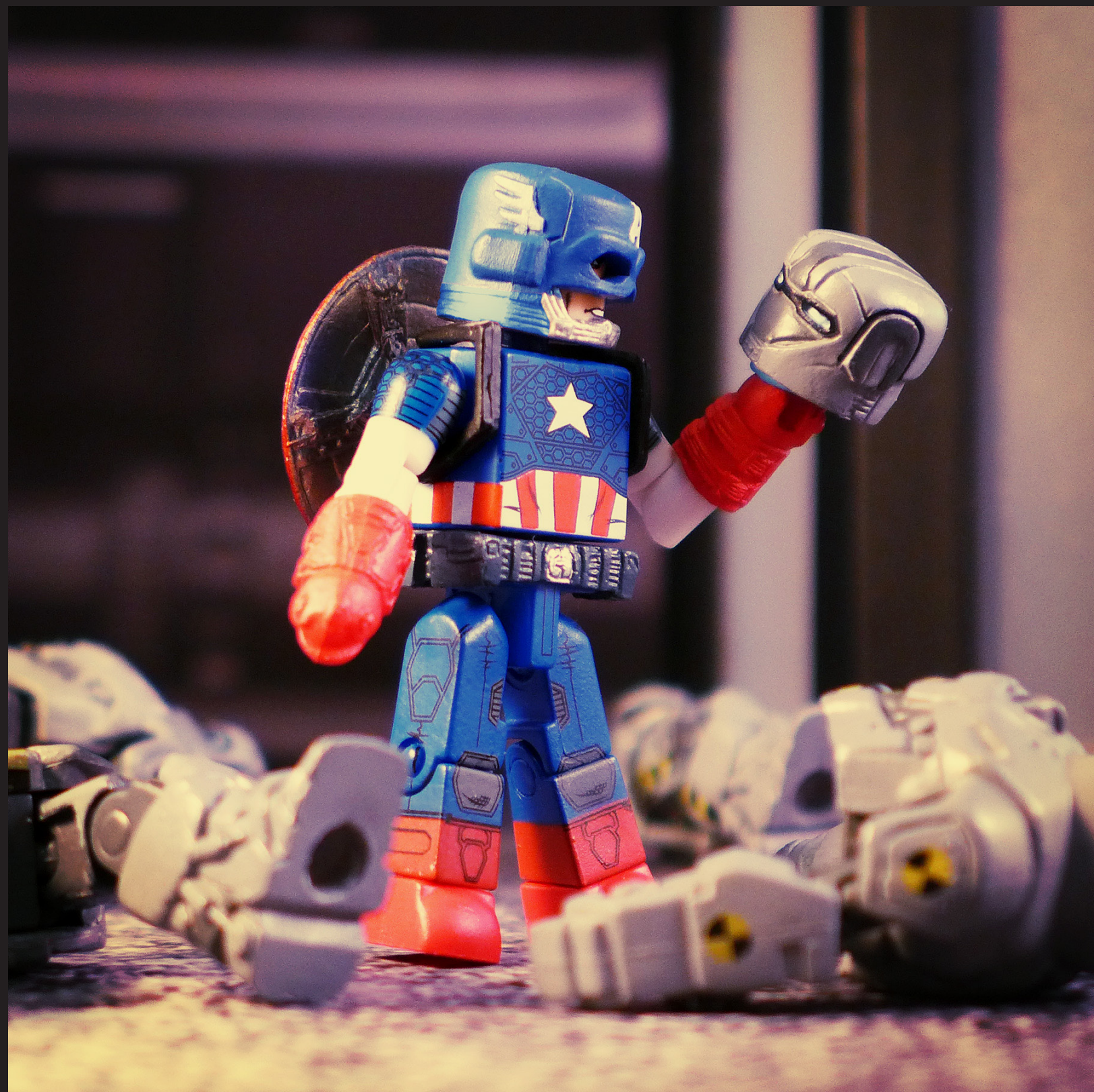
*Seconds later, the generator explodes. The roar is deafening. Once again, my training kicks in and I get my shield behind me just in time.*





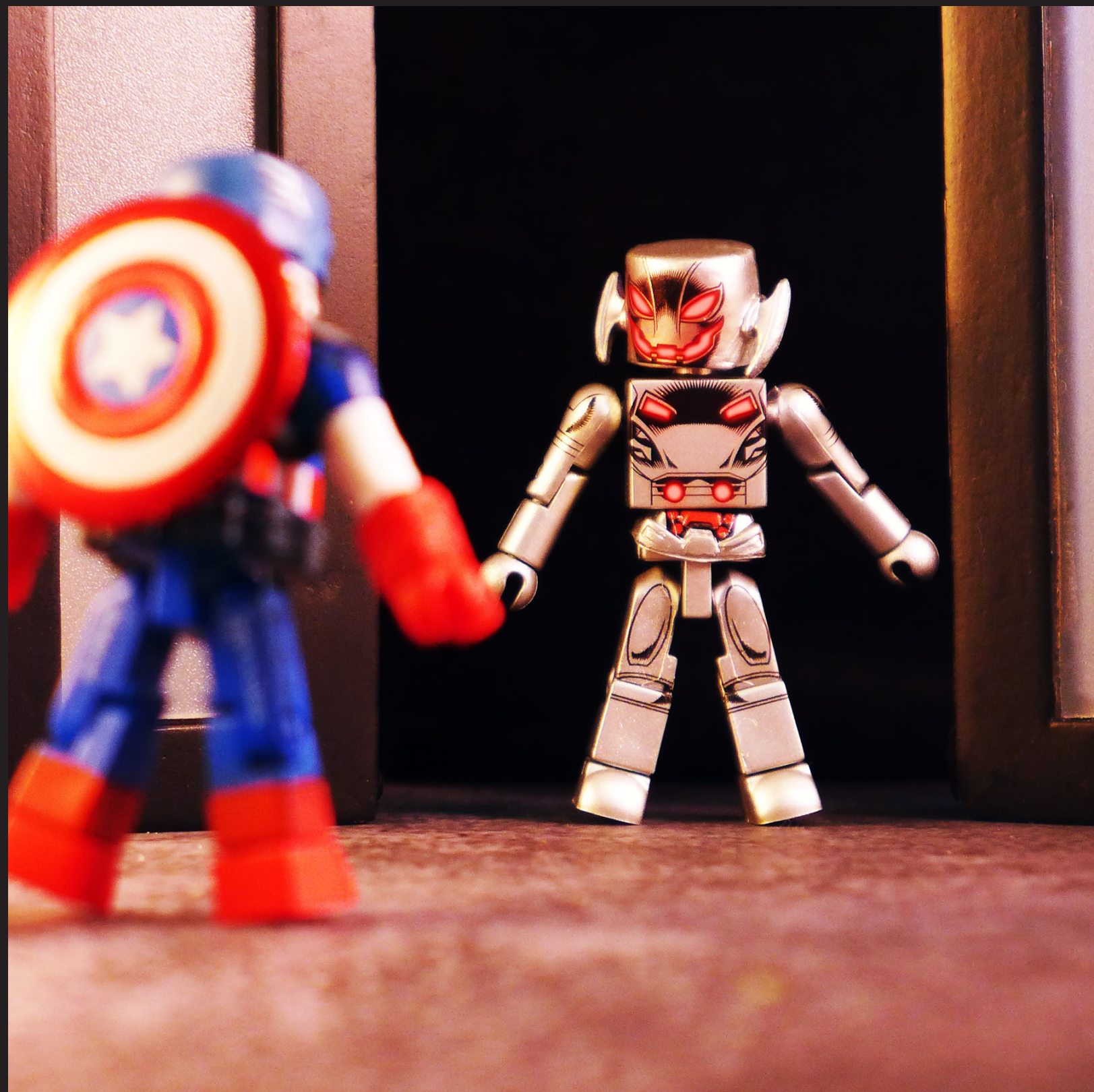
*I don't let the momentum go to waste.*





*I think that was the last of them. I take a closer look at the drones. This is old Justin Hammer tech. Very old. I thought Kang jumped into the future, but is this actually the past?*





*I hear the sound of metal boots approaching, and I assume it's another drone. I never expected it to be Ultron.*





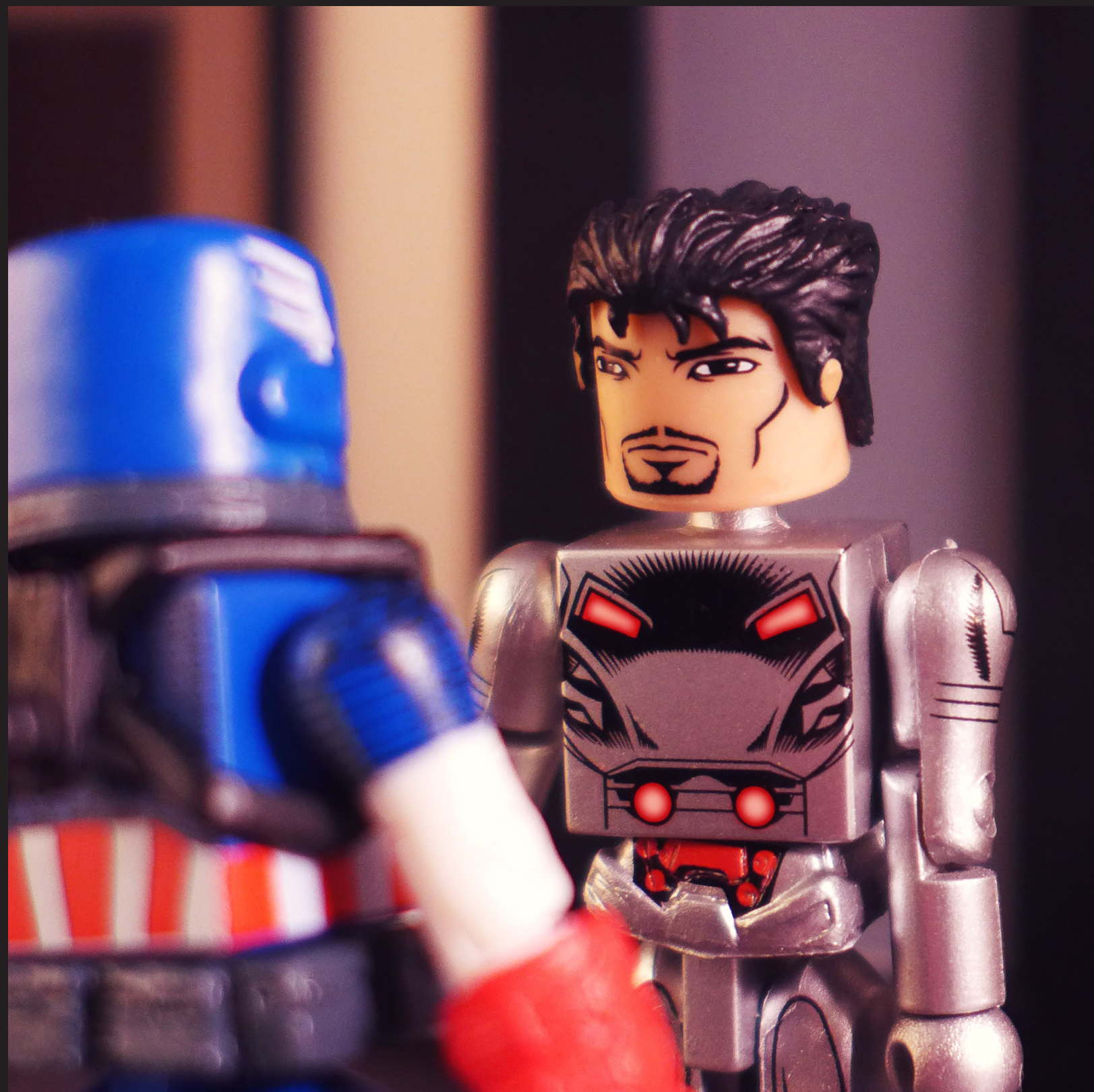
*I get an even bigger shock when Ultron removes his mask, and my friend Tony Stark is underneath.*





*Tony moves towards me with wide eyes. Given my history with him, I'm not sure if I will get a handshake or a punch in the face. Instead, I get a big metallic hug.*





*Tony tells me that he always knew I would come back. Then his face gets deadly serious, and he tells me what I have been waiting to hear. It has been 10 years since Kang and I disappeared into the time portal, and the Earth is dying.*





*Kang infected the Earth with a techno-organic virus that Tony calls the Infliction. Almost immediately, the Infliction virus shut down every piece of electronics that had any Stark tech. This didn't only affect suits of armor and SHIELD, but hospitals, airplanes, and computers around the world. The internet collapsed, as data centers had been using Stark tech in their storage systems for years. But that was just the beginning.*





*The organic part of the Infliction virus got into the land and the water. Crops refused to grow. Animals started dying. The world's best scientists couldn't explain it. The Avengers helped where they could, but nothing could stop the Infliction.*





*Word got out that the Earth was weak. As the planet struggled to stay alive, our intergalactic enemies attacked in waves, including Thanos with a monstrous invasion force. The Avengers and other heroes managed to fight them off, but not without heartbreaking losses.*





*Tony spent countless hours trying to create new armors, but the Infliction virus always found it's way into the tech. Things became desperate, and the Avengers had to resurrect Ultron, defeat him, and steal his technology, which was somehow immune to Kang's virus. The Avengers built these black research facilities in order to put every last resource into defeating the virus. Despite the best efforts of thousands of scientists and researchers, their efforts had failed.*





*I knew I had to snap Tony out of his despair. There was one thing that had always worked for me. I tell him that the Avengers have to assemble again. Tony's eyes light up as soon as I say the words. Each Avenger is currently based in a different part of the world, in order to help as many people as possible. But Kang is back, and we can't give him a chance to execute the next phase of his plan.*





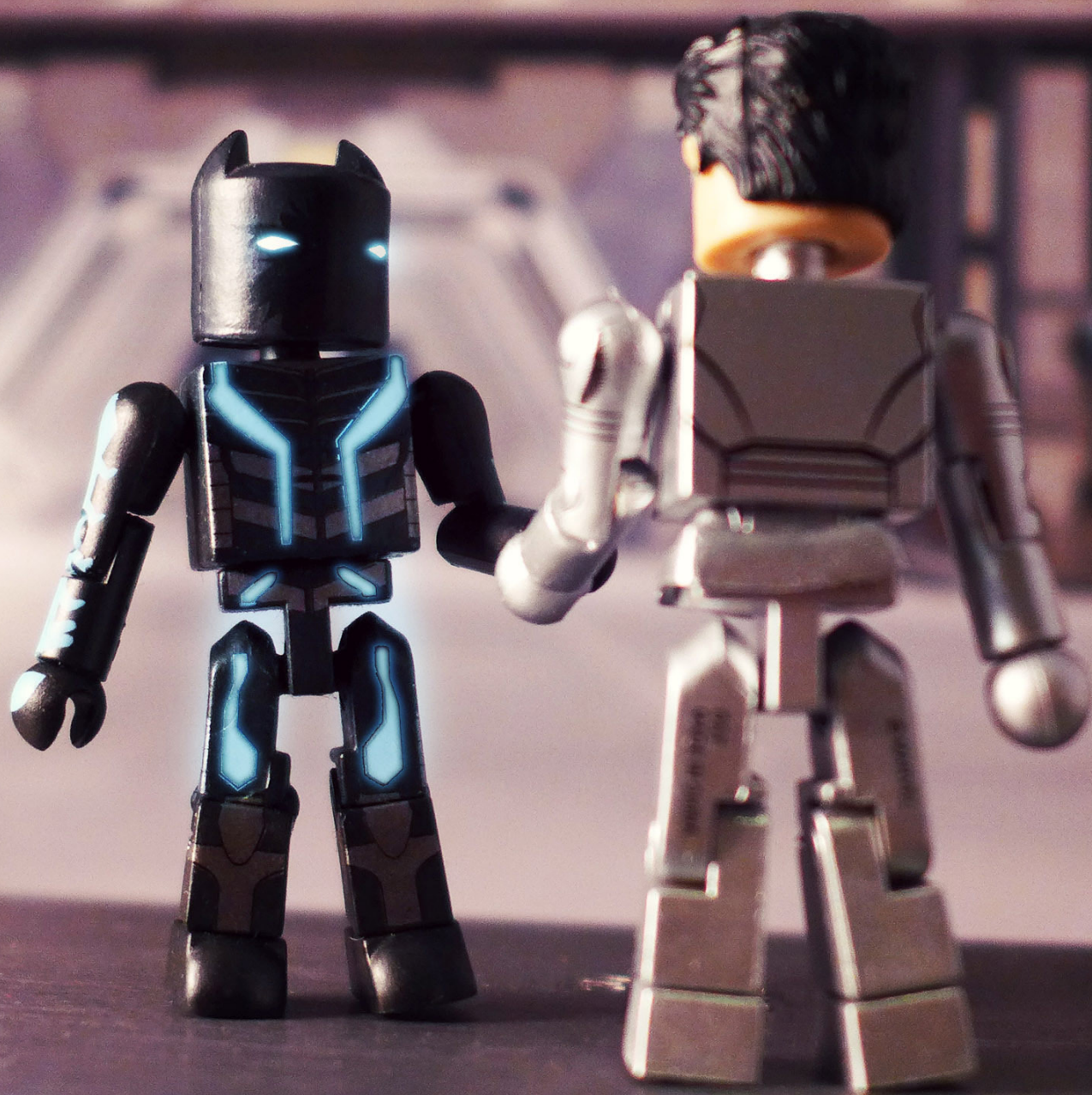
*Tony gathers this world's Avengers together. They are so different from the Avengers I know. So much pain in their eyes. It also strikes me how few there are. Tony tells me that there are other Avengers working off-world to help found human colonies, just in case the Earth really is doomed.*





*The Vision's original body was almost completely destroyed by the Phalanx during one of the attacks on Earth. They tried to assimilate what was left of him into their hive mind, but Vision resisted. He crafted himself a new body from their own tech, and used it to help the Avengers defeat the Phalanx.*





*T'Challa and Tony greet each other like two old soldiers. They had worked on modifying Ultron's tech together, and the new Black Panther suit uses parts from an Ultron drone. It makes him more durable and allows him to absorb energy attacks. I can't see T'Challa's eyes through his mask, but I can hear the pain in his voice. Like everywhere else, Wakanda has suffered terribly over the past decade.*





*Dr. Strange was the one who actually stopped Thanos. When everything seemed hopeless, he went to a dimension of malignant dark magic and let it consume him. He returned to the battle and boiled Thanos alive in his own skin. Steven can't separate himself from the poisonous darkness. Emma Frost joined the Avengers after the death of Cyclops and most of the other X-Men. Her black outfit is the only sign of her grief. She hides the rest behind a wall of abrasion and sarcasm.*





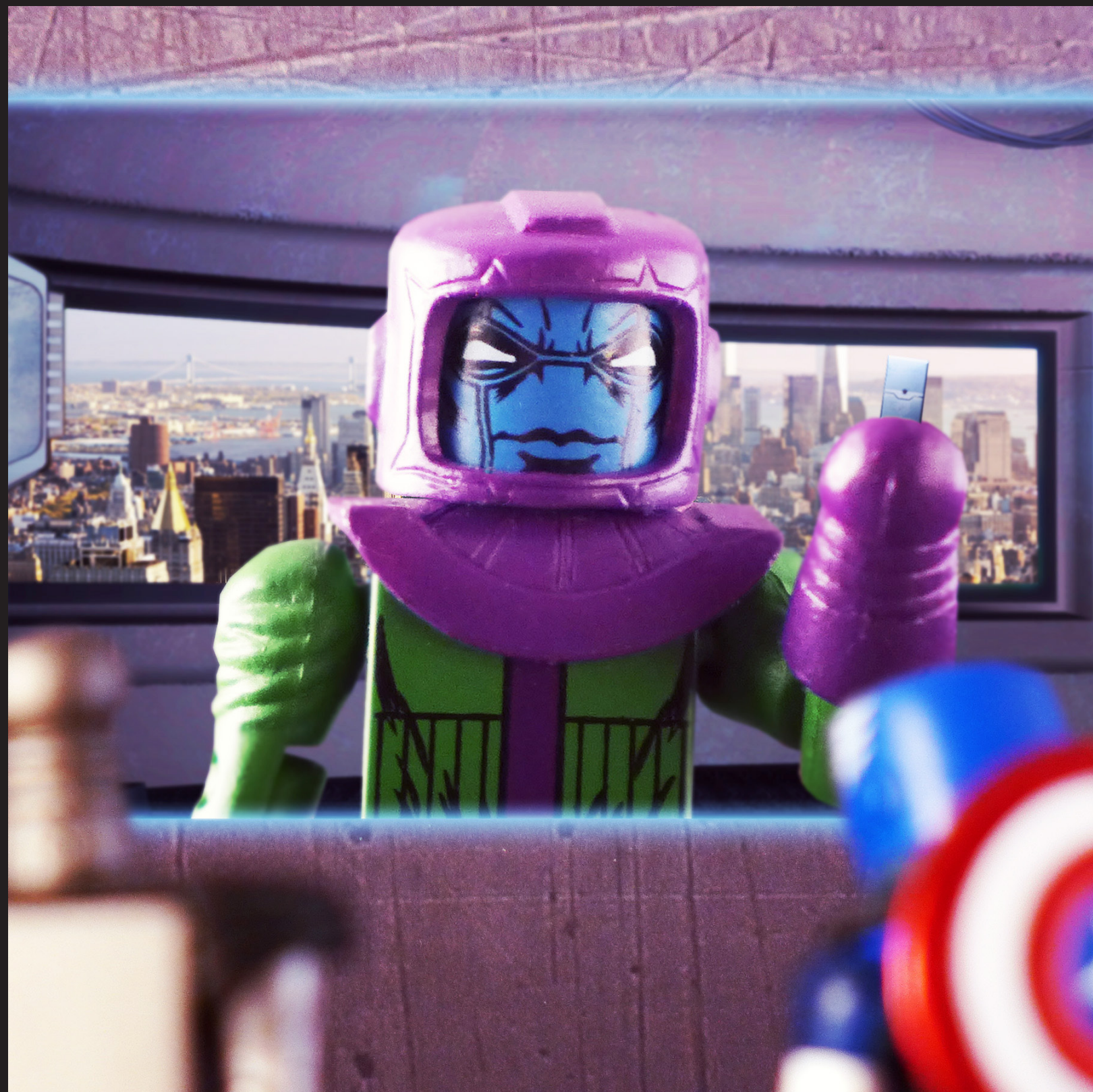
*I catch up with Hank on his way to the lab. He wants to review Tony's latest research as soon as possible. Hank was mortally wounded in the fight against the Phalanx. At the time, the Avengers were using whatever tech they could find, including Arnim Zola's. T'Challa brought Beast's dying body to an old Zola lab, and transferred his consciousness into one of Zola's machines. Since then, Beast has been working day and night to find a cure for the Infliction virus.*





*On our way to the lab, Kang's face suddenly appears on every monitor and screen. I was hoping I had more time before it came to this. Kang tells all of planet Earth that he will cure the Infliction Virus if we bow to him as king, and if all remaining heroes surrender to him. Crops will grow again. Animal populations will rise. Earth will have the technology it needs to become strong again. Kang must have chosen this time specifically to make this move.*





*Kang tells the world that if the heroes do not surrender within 24 hours at the old Avengers Tower, he will destroy the cure, leaving the Earth to slowly die. As he says this, he holds up a small item that looks like a memory card. Kang ends the transmission with a cruel montage of how the virus has affected the Earth. Desert landscapes that used to be lush fields. The skeletons of farm animals. Hungry people. As if they needed to be reminded.*





*As we hurry back to meet the other Avengers, I keep thinking about Beast in Zola's body - a cybernetic body that still functions, just like Ultron's tech and Justin Hammer's drones. With each racing footstep, I start to form a plan.*





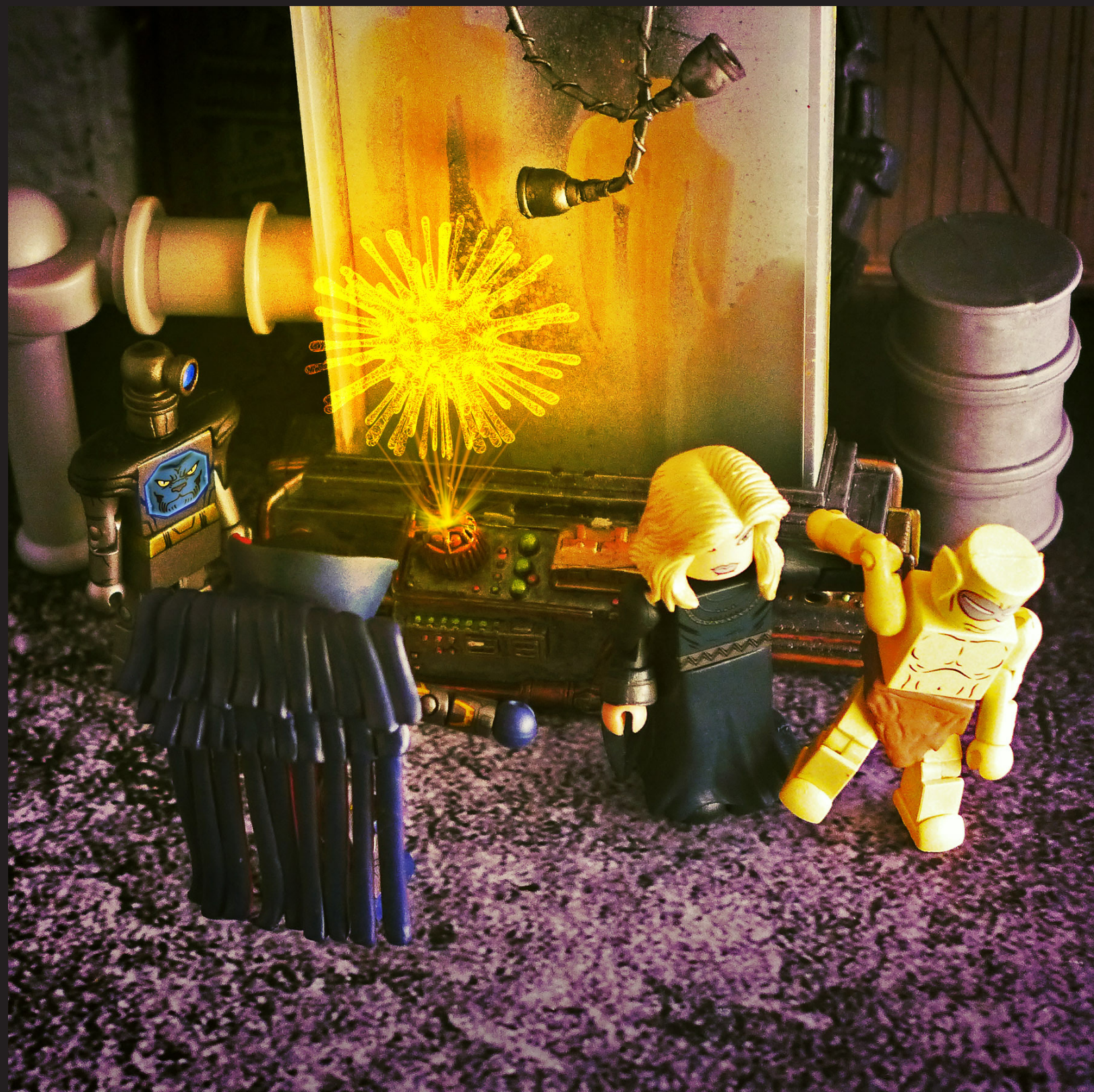
*The other Avengers help me put the final pieces together. Since Kang did not formulate his virus to attack Ultron or Zola's machinery, he must have disregarded other villains as well. We are going to use Earth's villains in our fight against Kang, either through their tech, their research, or hopefully, by their own choice. We each have tasks to complete, and we will meet in a warehouse near Avengers Tower in 23 hours.*





*Beast heard rumors that Mr. Sinister has been working on a genetically modified version of the Infliction Virus that can destroy itself. This could help us win the battle without even throwing a punch. Beast and Emma set out to find him. They head towards his last known location, and after reading a few minds, Emma is able to track him down. They find Sinister working on his latest test subjects - dozens of screaming Moloids in separate containers.*





*In a different time and place, a battle might have started. But this world is dying, and uneasy alliances are necessary to save it. Sinister agrees to release his prisoners, share his research, and generally behave himself. Emma helps the Moloids get back to their tunnels, then starts on a mission of her own. Two hours later, I receive a short message from Beast: WE NEED GROOT.*





*Groot is one of the “off world” Avengers who is helping to set up a human colony on a space station given to Earth by the Shi’ar. There is no way we can get Groot back here before time runs out. Dr. Strange tells me to leave it to him, and begins glowing bright red. A horrible wailing noise fills the room, like a thousand animals being slaughtered. Strange suddenly vanishes in a bright flash of light, and something smells like blood. I don’t like this one bit.*





*I don't know how Dr. Strange was able to travel over 300 miles through outer space in a matter of seconds, but I do know that he arrived in the middle of a Brood attack. Groot and a team of human soldiers were trying to hold them off, but were heavily outnumbered.*





*Strange also never told me how he stopped the Brood attack, but I suspect it wasn't pretty. Can he really contain this twisted darkness inside of him? I am starting to worry more about him than Kang.*





*Strange drops Groot off at Sinister's lab, then excuses himself to "replenish his crimson energy". I don't even want to know what that involves.*





*I don't know what kind of weapons Kang has at his disposal, but we need to be able to fight off whatever he throws at us, or at least distract him long enough to grab the cure. Tony tells me that Dr. Doom tried to take over the the world a few years ago, and found himself imprisoned in the Negative Zone as a result. But his Doombot army remains. Tony will use his Ultron tech to infiltrate Doom's castle, hopefully keeping Doombot losses to a minimum.*





*Once inside, Tony will access Doom's central command core, and will assign the Doombots to follow his orders. Ultron leading Doombots against Kang - this made Tony laugh. He will meet us at the rendezvous point in New York City.*





*T'Challa and I leave the facility and make our way across the vast desert, which used to be the lush farmlands of western New York state. We talk about Kang and our plans for the upcoming battle. But after a while we inevitably start telling stories about the old days, reminiscing about the good times, and even having a few laughs. It seems out of place, but I am glad to be going into this battle as friends.*





*We make one stop along the way to pick up a former nemesis who has a vested interest in seeing this world survive. I am keeping this particular foe on the sidelines as a wild card, to be called in if needed.*





*The Vision is already in New York City, scanning the area around Avengers Tower for any traps, weaponry, or sensors that Kang might have set up. If the area is clear, he will get closer and will check the tower itself.*





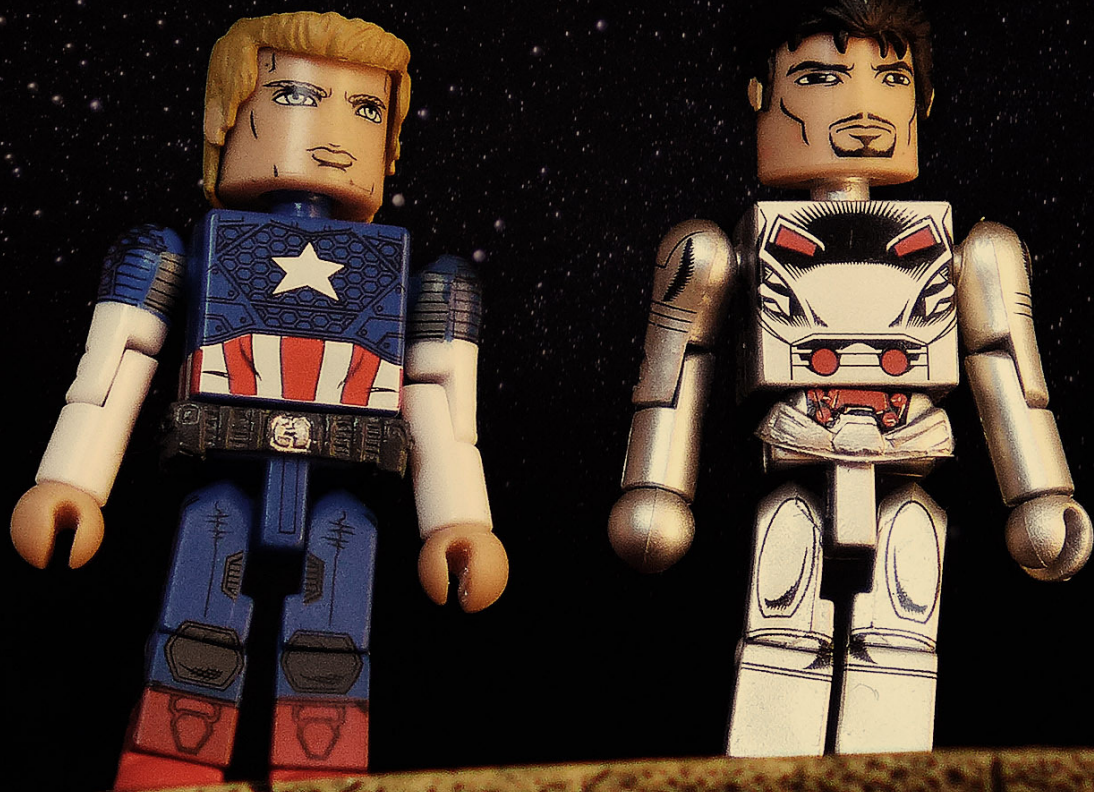
*Emma's mission is to recruit Flash Thompson, also known as Agent Carnage. He was formerly attached to the Venom symbiote, but that entity was destroyed in the fight against Thanos and his army. Flash could barely contain Venom during their time together. With Carnage, it was hopeless. The symbiote filled him with rage and bloodlust, leaving him more of a broken man than he ever was before.*





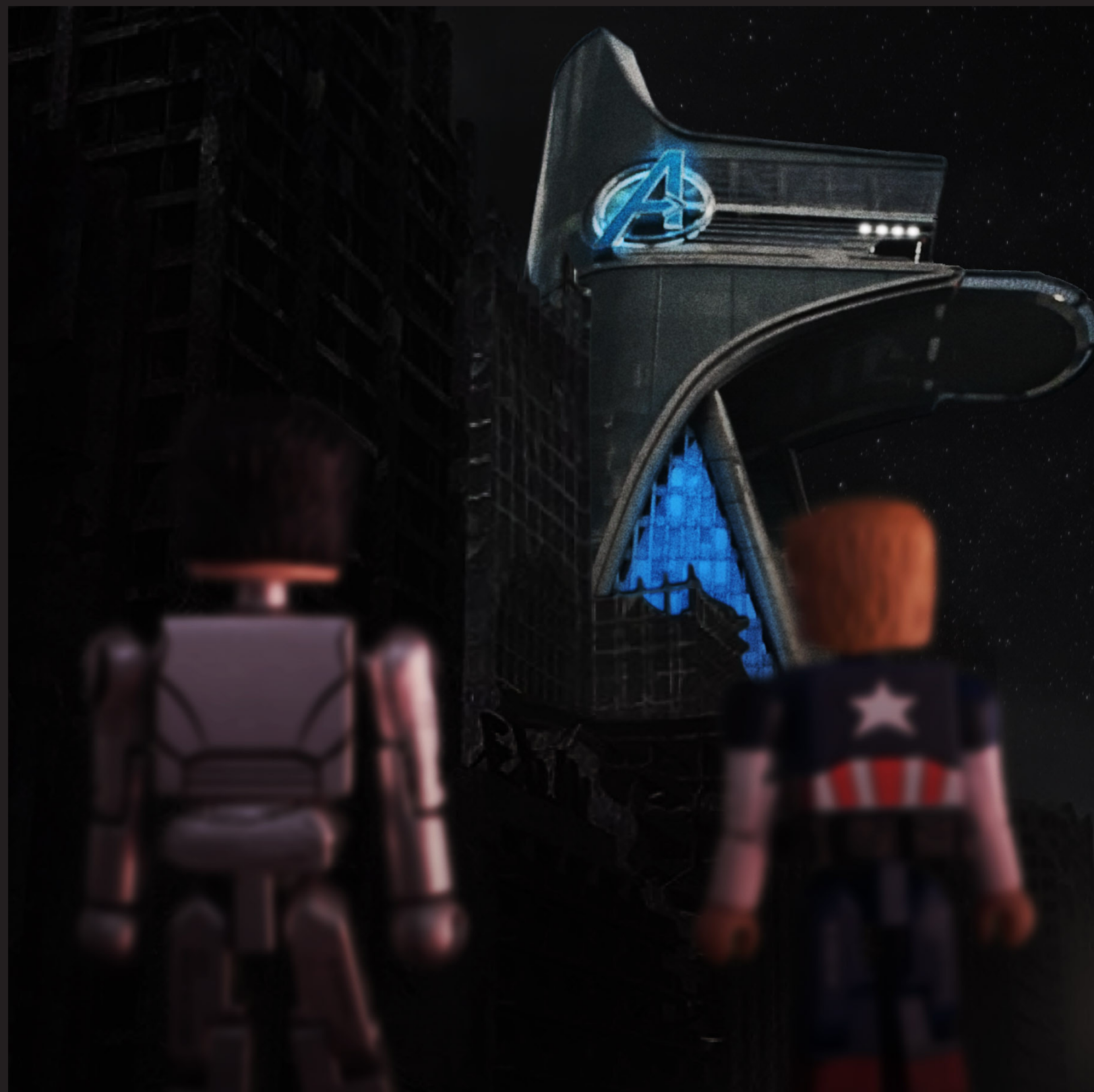
*Emma will use her telepathic abilities to keep the symbiote under control, allowing Flash Thompson to be the hero that he used to be. I wish we could separate him from the creature, but he isn't ready for that yet. One battle at a time.*





*Tony and I meet on the rooftop at the rendezvous point while we wait for the others to arrive. He tells me how the city always reminds him of Pepper. She also died in the fight against Thanos, like so many other heroes and loved ones. Tony admits that he was glad when Strange boiled Thanos alive, and that he hopes the same fate befalls Kang. There might have been a time when I would have argued with Tony... but with millions dead, I just can't find the words.*





*I ask Tony why Avengers Tower is still shining and clean while the rest of the city has fallen to ruin. Tony says that prior to yesterday it didn't look like this. Kang has polished the tower into a shining symbol of his upcoming regime. And he couldn't have done it without help.*





*T'Challa joins us and sees the glowing tower. He tells us an old African proverb: "A large chair does not make a king." We all consider this for a minute, and then Tony tells us his favorite proverb: "You can't run and scratch your ass at the same time." T'Challa laughs and tells a few vulgar proverbs from his grandfather. Pretty soon we are all roaring, with our laughter echoing through the dark city.*





*Vision, Emma, and Agent Carnage arrive. Beast and Sinister need more time in the lab, and who knows where Strange is. It will take a few hours for all of the Doombots to get into position outside of the sensor range around Avengers Tower. So I suggest we all get some sleep. T'Challa takes first watch as he sharpens an axe that belonged to his fallen sister. These people have all lost so much. If we are able to defeat Kang, do I try to find a way home, or do I stay here in this time and help rebuild?*





*Morning comes, and the Doombots are in position all around Avengers Tower, including some heavy artillery on adjacent towers, taken from the last alien invasion. Still no sign of Doctor Strange. We move out without him.*





*Emma changes into a more field-appropriate uniform. She will mostly stay back and will allow us to communicate as a team telepathically, as well as helping Flash Thompson keep the Carnage symbiote in check. We make our way to the tower. We don't split up - we do this together as Avengers. Kang's reign will end before it even begins.*



*To be continued...*