

With the first hurdle completed I quickly made nine more copper rods of magic, carding them once they were drained of electricity. Once I was done with that, I quickly gathered everything I had bought for making a danger sense, put it in a storage box and carded it before starting to pack the quarry workshop up. The sun was getting low and I could easily finish this at the apartment. We left the tent up, the work stations set up and the stacks of metal stock alone but put everything else back into the storage shed before I carded it, leaning on Ema for support.

“Should you really be pushing yourself like that?” She asked when I recovered and stood on my own. “What if you’re hurting yourself?”

“It doesn't feel painful, just tiring. Like I'm pulling on too much of my energy at once.” I explained. “The second I start showing symptoms of it hurting me I'll stop.”

Reluctantly Ema nodded, taking a step back. After one last check around to make sure we hadn't left anything behind I carded her, exosuit and all before traveling back to the apartment. Once we had settled in and I had a quick snack, making another note to go shopping soon, I sat down with my box of stuff, pulling it all out and laying it out on the table.

“Okay. I think the best bet is to keep the electronic stuff away from each other as long as possible to keep that concept from stacking and interacting with the magic rods.” I said, mostly mumbling to myself as I started grouping stuff together, though Ema was floating around.

I started by combining all of the sensors and electronics I had bought with the books I had gotten, leaving out the security cameras because they didn't really have the right concepts in sufficient quantities. After those were combined I added a stone to each of the cards, doubling up on azurite and lapis lazuli. From there I combined everything together, all the way down to three cards, two doubles and one triple. I took three leather bands that I had bought previously and combined each of them with a copper magic rod. Satisfied with the magic concept in each of them I combined them with the three sensor and book combinations. Finally I fused them all together, resulting in a complicated, magically powerful B ranked card.

“Did it work?” Ema asked, hovering over my shoulder.

“...I think so? It feels like it did.” I answered, scratching my head as I looked at the card. “It's a very complicated card. But it's magically strong, the electronic and electricity concepts are pretty well buried and it's potent...”

“So what is the problem?” She asked, floating around to look at me.

“It felt too easy.” I admitted with a shrug before pushing the new creation into my hands.

I pulled up my under armor and quickly attached the band as a sort of ankle bracelet, lowering my armor back down and wiggling my foot around, testing my range of movement. It was barely noticeable and almost completely hidden by the layer of flexible protective metal.

Once I was satisfied it was secure and unobtrusive I stood and went to the kitchen, grabbed a fork and returned. With a little bit of work I bent a single prong until it was standing up straight, bending the rest of the handle to keep that point upwards. As I worked I looked up at my partner.

“Ema, I need to know definitively that it works.” I explained. “I’m going to close my eyes and I want you to move it on this side of the table. When you’re done I’m going to slam my hand down. I want you to randomly push it under my hand.”

“What?!” Ema asked loudly. “Why are you always so determined to hurt yourself?”

“I’m not! Getting hurt sucks. But when my amulet heals me in minutes it’s hard to think of it as temporary pain, especially when working on something important. “ I explained with a shrug. “Now come on, we need to test this and the only way to do it is by putting me in danger.”

After a few minutes I finally convinced Ema it was necessary. I closed my eyes and waited, the sound of the bent fork moving around in front of me. A few seconds later Ema solemnly said she was ready and after a pause and a wince I slammed my hand down on the table. I couldn’t help but let out a sigh of relief when my palm slapped the table. We repeated the experiment a few times before it finally happened.

I was about to jerk my hand down to slap the table when suddenly I could feel something was wrong. It was like tingling up my spine, a bad feeling and a gut instinct all at the same time. I stopped my hand immediately, having barely moved it at all.

“Holy hell!” I said, opening my eyes to find the twisted fork, ready to stab my hand. “That was not subtle at all. The second I was going to hurt myself I knew something bad was going to happen.”

“How did it feel?”

“Like my body already knew it was about to hurt itself, despite me having no idea if I was.” I explained. “Yeah, I’m never taking this off.”

“Good.” Ema said simply. “Can you please stop hurting yourself now? Or trying to hurt yourself?”

“I’ll do my best, Ema.” I answered with a chuckle. “But no promises.”

Happy with my progress for the day I cleaned up any of the messes I had made and turned in for the night. I could feel more stress falling away as I relaxed in my bed. I had a way to escape if someone tried to catch me, and a way to keep people from one shotting me out of nowhere. I could feel a good night’s sleep coming on.

----- *Five hours later* -----

I woke up already swinging.

I lashed out and my fist struck metal, but I kept punching, my vision still blurry from sleep. I could see just enough to lock on to the dark shape standing by my bed, a knife looking object in their hand. My adrenaline was pumping full tilt as I activated my ring pistol, aimed and dumped half a dozen silent shots into their torso before they finally shouted.

“STOP! STOP IT’S ME!”

The figure stepped back and I stood, gun as steady as a rock despite the fact that I could count my heartbeats with the blood pounding in my ears. It took a full ten seconds for me to calm down enough to realize who’s voice it was. I lowered my pistol but kept it in my hand.

“EMA?! What the fuck was that!” I shouted, blinking the sleep from my eyes. “What the hell are you doing!”

“I was testing your dangersense.” She explained, clearly upset. “We needed to know if it worked when you were asleep.”

“So you were going to stab me in my sleep?!” I asked incredulously.

“Just in the leg...” She explained, her exosuit collapsing to its default form as she floated to me. “I’m sorry, but we needed to know.”

After a five second pause I tapped the return button on my pistol before collapsing back onto my bed, sitting on the edge. I rubbed my face as my heart slowly returned to normal. Ema stopped in front of me, running a light scan.

“Are you okay?” I finally asked.

“Yes. The bullets barely scratched me.” She said, continuing her scan.

“Thank god my pistol is silent, or we would have some serious explaining to do right now.” I said.

“I’m sorry.” She said again, now floating right in front of me.

“No.. no it's okay.” I said, finally pulling my hands away from my face. “You're right, it needed to be tested, and I was just talking about how necessary hurting myself was. It was the being woken up part that threw me for a loop. How well did it work?”

“You woke up the second I realized I was going to have to actually stab you and started planning on how.” Ema answered. “The original plan was to just stand over you menacingly and poke you with a dull knife. But that didn't get a reaction.”

“Hmm... that means I'm at risk for truly random acts of violence. You could have definitely gotten me if you stabbed me immediately.” I said, groaning as the adrenaline slowly wore off. “On the other hand, you were hurting me to help me. That means it's not tricked by people who have convinced themselves that they are helping me. For my own good type stuff.”

I looked back at my bed and shook my head, standing and stretching, before heading to my dresser.

“You're not going back to sleep?” She asked, guilt in her voice.

“No, I am one hundred percent awake now.” I said, shaking my head. “I don't know if I'm going to be able to fall asleep tonight, never mind right now.”

“Sorry... I should have waited a bit longer so you could get some more sleep.”

“No, then I might have woken up.” I said with a shrug. “Don't worry about it Ema, I'm glad you did this, it needed to be tested. Imagine if I hadn't woken up until you stabbed me? It would have saved my life later.”

Ema bobbed a bit before following me out of my room. I went about my morning routine, taking it easy and basically killing time. When I was showered and fed I sat down and pulled out the deck, examining the cards. I stopped at the leftover magic rods, a thought occurring to me.

“You know... Magic might improve other stuff as well...” I mumbled to myself.

“What was that?” Ema asked, turning from the laptop.

“I was just thinking that the magic rods might be able to improve other things.” I explained, thinking for a moment before continuing. “It might be a good idea to spend some time upgrading stuff today as well, spending a bit more cash on things, bumping everything up to the next level.”

“Are you sure you want to add magic to everything? If everything relies on magic what if you run into someone who knows how to use it against you?”

“That's... A fair point...” I said, rubbing my chin and taking a sip of coffee before continuing. “Okay, here is the plan. I keep the basics and the backups magic free, like a foundation. That way it's all conceptually backed, which seems to just give the middle finger to the fabric of reality itself.”

After a half hour going through what I had made that had no magic in it, we decided that my under armor, my two back up guns, as well as my cuffs of strength and stamina would remain non-magical.

“I think I’m going to spend the first half of the day consolidating, upgrading and finishing everything up.” I said after a few minutes. “Then I can spend the second half of the day building my primary weapons.”

“You still haven’t told me what you have planned for that.”

“You’ll see soon enough.” I teased with a smirk. “Even sooner because you’ll be watching me make them.”

For the next few hours we killed time testing out more aspects of the dangersense before eventually we started brainstorming about upgrades for everything I had made so far. When the time that shops usually open rolled around I was out the door and eager to get started. I was running around New York and eventually Austin as well as the outskirts of Chicago for the entire morning, making frequent stops to the quarry to drop stuff off. After spending a ridiculous amount of money, including another trip to a jewelry store for gems, including several diamonds. I traveled to the quarry for the last time. I pushed out the storage shed and sat down to have some Mcdonalds for lunch, recovering from the shopping blitz the morning had been. When I was sufficiently recovered I turned to Ema.

“Alright, while I work on upgrading and everything I want you to take apart the super truck.” I explained. “Remove exterior panels so I can make them lighter and completely bulletproof. Don’t worry about damaging the truck itself, as long as the panels can be reattached somehow we can use the repair tablet to fix it.”

“What about the windows?”

“What do you think the diamonds were for?”

First up, while Ema got to work on her own assignment, was finally making a proper pair of gloves and boots. I mixed a few pairs of gloves with some kevlar, my custom super metal plating, nitinol and a set of brass knuckles. I managed to convince a pawn shop in Austin to sell me the brass knuckles under the table, despite them being illegal in Texas. I then combined all of that into the smokescreen gloves. The result was a pair of B ranked armored gloves with metal plating that seemed to almost solidify when I made a fist.

Unlike my gloves I started from the ground up for my boots, working a ton of materials into them. Running shoes, shock absorbing inserts, shoes that claim to help with running, all combined with sixteen pairs of black combat boots. I layered in kevlar, my super metal plating as well before mixing up a transformation card and combining them with a comfortable but stylish pair of leather sneakers. No more spending time changing between shoes, just a single

button press under the tongue of the sneakers and suddenly I was wearing B ranked black armored combat boots. I left the gloves normal as I was already wearing enough stuff on my hands, I didn't need rings that turn into gloves or anything like that

After I was done fixing a glaring hole in my armor I started upgrading everything else. I made a second pair of my armored underlayer, this time adding a bit more breathability and flexibility through added types of cloth. I also doubled down on electrical resistance, heat resistance and impact absorption before combining it all with the original. I was very happy with the result, as it was tougher in all ways and didn't impede my movement in the slightest. Despite the changes it looked almost exactly the same, though it had gotten a little bit of its shine back.

Once that was done I upgraded my healing amulet with a slew of things, basically anything with a healing concept I could get my hands on. I created a whole second amulet, this time focusing on more realistic medicines. When I was done I combined it back with the original, creating a new, slightly smaller amulet that was significantly more effective. Ema yelled at me when I tested it, but was happy that the cut healed almost twice as quickly as the original. I also upgraded her driving ring with the books I had bought a while ago.

With some gaps in my armor patched and some things upgraded, I moved on to adding magic to what was left. I upgraded the strength enhancement on my deployable chest armor before adding one sheet of super metal enhanced by two magic rods to the deployed chest, legs and helmet. And, since I was already in the grove making the magical super metal, I quickly made my way through all of the panels that Ema had stripped from the super truck, though I went heavy on the aluminum to make all of it lighter as well. I left Ema to work on getting the windows free while I went back to other upgrades.

My next and last upgrade to my deployable armor took a while to get right. I made multiple sets of glasses, each individual one some sort of vision enhancement like I had done for Clint. I then combined the glasses with a few ballistic helmets to keep the general helmet concept strong. When I was done I added the final combined helmet to my original deployed helmet, the result was slightly sleeker looking and had the ability to shift vision modes just like Clint's glasses did. I also made a pair of multi mode sunglasses for Ema, which she happily accepted.

Satisfied with the additions to my helmet I finished a project I had been meaning to for a while. I made two quadruple stacked knives. The first was a pocket knife that was big enough to be useful but small enough to fit into my pocket, the second was a much more dangerous looking KA-Bar straight edge. They both had selector wheels to adjust the level of bullshit, which was a solid plan as the KA-Bar cut through solid rock like it was clay on its highest. I hooked the sheath for the KA-Bar to the belt of my deployable armor and immediately bound both of the knives to myself.

When I was done with my knives I put everything on, deploying all of my armor before putting on my gloves. pushing a massive floor mirror out of the Deck, carrying it to a clear corner

of the tent before stepping back and getting a good look at myself. The under armor looked mostly the same, but the deployable armor now had copper and black highlights worked throughout the plating and connections. The copper highlights had a luster that seemed to almost glow. I smirked and turned to Ema, retracting my armor with a smirk.

“That was a good start.” I said with a smirk. “Now let's make those windows bullet proof so I can get to work making some more guns.”