

An hour or so later the three of us had finished our drinks and food and were ready to leave. The first time we had done this Steve had pointed out that drinking probably wasn't the best thing to be doing before trying out potentially dangerous gear, but I quickly pointed out that none of us were capable of getting drunk any more. Bucky had laughed when Steve blushed, caught being a goody two shoes.

We left the bar and headed to an alley, taking a look around before they both held out their hands and I traveled us to the range, a dozen acres of land I bought with Tony's help, located in the middle of nowhere. We landed in the corner of the same tent that had been set up at the Quarry, now set up as a sort of break area, with self contained fan units, lights and even a fridge that kept itself stocked with beer, soda and a few snacks. Not far outside was a well made range hut, complete with chairs, gun rests, spotter monoculars, anything you could need at a range. A short walk the other direction was a large three car garage, a simple metal structure strengthened by vibranium and Asgardian alloy.

I set this place up shortly after I moved my workshop from the quarry to its current location. Steve, Bucky and I had been coming here on and off for a few months as a way to unwind and a way for me to get some feedback on some of my newest creations.

"So I've got a few updated versions of the guns we tried last time, a new shotgun and a heavy cannon I want your opinion on." I said before gesturing to the garage. "There's also two new vehicles I want you to look at."

As we walked to the gun range I pushed out a trunk of weapons, flicking out a card so it appeared on the concrete floor of the range hut. I cracked the trunk open and pulled out two guns, handing one to each of them before grabbing the third for myself. It was a conceptual blend of several rifles, including the SCAR, the HKMR762 and two M14's, all to try and create the perfect high powered DMR.

This particular attempt had a soft blue glow emanating from the seams, softly pulsing from one end to the other. Each rifle was modified to run off energy cells, and therefore never ran out of ammo, before it was combined into this form. I also fiddled with the individual parts, trying to tweak it into its perfect form before I stacked it for its ultimate version.

The final result was a sleeker, longer rifle that leaned heavily towards the M14 but still pulled from the SCAR. It fired blue pulses of energy which immediately they both recognized when I first showed them off. It had taken a while to assure them that this weapon would not disintegrate its targets unless you specifically set it to that setting.

"You fixed the recoil?" Bucky asked as he checked over the rifle.

“It’s scalable now.” I explained. “It’s on the stock controls.”

My last version had removed the recoil in its entirety, and they both immediately complained that without the recoil it was hard to anticipate and get into a rhythm of shooting. Bucky nodded and examined the left side of his stock, pushing open a small panel of buttons. There was a switch to deploy a complete silencer, one to dampen the light, one to deploy a bipod, a small knob to choose between six different scopes and a new one to adjust how much the weapon kicked.

The three of us sat down in the three different bays and aimed down the range. Scattered down the range were barrels, small wooden structures and a few sandbag barricades. After settling in I pushed a button on the wall next to me and a few dozen targets popped up, slowly moving around, back and forth, up and down. After a moment’s pause we all opened fire, testing out the different options.

“I like the scalable recoil,” Bucky said, nailing a distant target in the head. “Having the best of both worlds comes in handy.”

“Still a bit of a space gun for my tastes, but I can feel the M14 influence on it,” Steve added, hitting a closer target with a three round burst. “What are you designing this for anyway, you already have your guns?”

My guns, which were each charged with a Destroyer armor beam, had changed little since I originally made them. Each of their forms, two revolvers, a rifle and a shotgun were triple stacked, having all but slammed into diminishing returns at that point. The rifle, which had been the only form that did not have infinite ammo, had been enhanced similar to how these guns were, but with a focus on more mid range.

“Because I can.” I said with a shrug, picking off one of the furthest targets as it peaked over a barrel. “Plus having a little extra fire power packed away just in case could come in handy.”

“A little extra firepower?” Bucky said skeptically, his eye roll almost tangible. “You could already take over a small country with a dozen of these things and I’m sure you plan on stacking them until they can take out a tank.”

I stayed silent, unwilling to lie more, which only made Steve and Bucky chuckle. We spent a few more minutes trying out this iteration of my DMR before we stopped.

“I like it,” Steve said as he handed the rifle back. “I’m not sure what else you could add to it at this point. Have you figured out how to make it non lethal?”

“No, and I officially gave up on it,” I said with a shrug. “The lethal and nonlethal concepts clash too much, even through a transformation. Plus Tony pointed out that having a gun that is lethal and non lethal is just asking for someone to mess up and shoot one when they meant to do the other. I’m going to make a dedicated non lethal option. ”

“That's probably for the best.”

Next we tested a shotgun that I had just finished developing that visually looked like a sleek and streamlined Saiga-12, even if it was a combination of several shotguns. The main advancement I had made was the ability to switch between a few different types of rounds to fire. With a simple selector wheel you could switch between slugs that explode, pierce, deliver a small EMP like shock, or deliver a purely kinetic blow. It also had a few “spread” modes that fire smaller, less penetrative but still extremely lethal bolts of energy, for use in situations where going through a wall could mean a civilian casualty. It also had a few different options on the gun frame itself, such as a silencer, a few different types of sights and the same scalable recoil.

“The scalable recoil is perfect on these,” Steve said after I had explained the gun's abilities and we all started trying them out. “No one likes to admit it but firing high powered slugs from a shotgun is not fun.”

“It's nice to be able to feel my arm still,” Bucky added.

“Yeah, it's getting added to all of my guns from now on,” I said. “I’m trying to figure out a way to add it to my revolvers.”

We shot a bit more before putting them away as well, Bucky taking one last look at the weapon before handing it to me.

“It does too much,” Bucky said, sitting back down on his chair. “You don't need the spreading options.”

“It would only get in the way I think,” Steve agreed “Having options is good, but making something complicated could mean death on a real battlefield.”

“Right, so I'll get rid of the spread rounds and add a cleared selector for the four remaining firing options,” I said, making a note on my phone. “What else?”

“Full auto like that is probably overkill,” Steve pointed out, Bucky nodding his head in agreement. “Is there a reason you have a shotgun at all? Why not attach those options to something else?”

I looked up with a blank face, my mind spinning around for a moment. My DMR was for mid to long range, and my already tested and finished assault rifle was focused more on mid to

short. There was no real reason, beyond the concept of delivering various payloads, for having a shotgun, not with the Deck blurring the lines of what was possible in a rifle frame.

"I... suppose you're not wrong. I'll see what I can do," I said, ideas already popping into my head. I put them aside for now, closing up the trunk and carding it.

"Alright, here is the last weapon, then I can show you the vehicles," I said, pushing the last weapon out of a card.

It was four and a half feet of over the shoulder fire power. A central tube ran through the entire length, starting with a thick rim at the business end, pulling from the FGM-148 Javelin. Most of its heft was in the front end, but instead of equipment for firing a rocket, it was a sleek housing that pulled back into a shoulder rest. It glowed with blue power just like the rifles and shotguns had, with the accompaniment of a soft hum you could only hear and feel when it rested on your shoulder.

"I call this the Combo Cannon," I explained. "Or CC for short. It fires a whole slew of different packages, in either an arcing or straight trajectory. The power and blast radius of each shot can be adjusted and it has no backdraft. It even has a no blast wave setting, which decreases the effectiveness of certain options but drastically reduces the concussive wave put off by the explosions. Its energy projectile can lock on to heat signatures, it can be steered or set to detonate after a certain time or proximity. While the shotgun might have fallen a bit flat, this needs to be in a separate package."

I stepped up to the firing window, adjusting several settings before aiming through the view screen. I designated a target up on the steep rise behind the range, before pulling the trigger.

The Cannon hummed loudly for just a second, charging up before sending a blast of energy down range. It impacted the side of the hill, almost three hundred meters away and detonated, creating a massive blast of blue energy that took down three trees. The sound of the explosion rolled over us, surprisingly quiet for the size of the explosion. Unsatisfied with the test I changed one of the settings before arcing a half dozen shots over everything in the range to blow deep craters in the far sand wall. These were much smaller, but still impressive explosions.

I turned and looked at the two soldiers, who were looking at me with jaws dropped.

"So... you guys want to give it a shot?"

The two soldiers spent the next hour or so absolutely demolishing my range, putting the CC through its paces. In the end they stopped when there wasn't much else to destroy.

"Uh... sorry about your range..." Steve said after realizing just how destructive they had been. "Do you need some help repairing it or...?"

"Don't worry about it," I assured him, the CC disappearing into my deck. "I'll get someone else to do it. So what do you guys think?"

"It's a little complicated," Steve answered. "That's not as big of a deal for something like that since any soldier will know better to just wildly press the trigger for a gun that big. But it could still lead to some issues."

"What if I boiled it down a bit? Two, maybe three dials and a few toggles? One for payload, one for power level and a third for concussive force? It would need a few extras but..."

We talked about the cannon for a bit more before eventually I carded it and started leading the pair over to the reinforced garage, opening the door easily.

"I've been messing around with vehicles for a bit now, just picking random roles and trying to build the best vehicle I could for that role."

Sitting in the garage were a bunch of different vehicles, all clearly modified or completely custom. The smallest was a pair of ATV's with a sleek science fiction vibe to them. The front wheels were attached to different supports, providing the absolute best of shock absorption. It sort of looked like two motorcycles attached together. Next to those was a larger buggy, with massive tires that had the best grip I could conceptually craft into it. The last vehicle was an absolute monster of a truck. Eight wheels, heavily armored and powered by six max stacked arc reactors, it was a behemoth. In fact, that was what I called it, the Behemoth.

It was also too big for me to card, making it almost completely useless. Though it did teach me a valuable lesson.

Apparently, I could make something inside a card that once I pushed it out I could not pull back in. I was just thankful I had kept it in the deck until I was down here at the range. It would have been a pain to deal with at the warehouse.

"Damn Maker, that is massive," Bucky said, walking to the massive truck. "Is it as tough as it looks?"

"Tougher." I assured him. "It's called the Behemoth."

Eventually the two focused on what I actually wanted them to focus on, the buggy and the two ATV's. After a few minutes of explaining their capabilities, as well as me handing both of them a conceptually crafted helmet, we drove out of the garage. Steve pulled out first in the buggy, with Bucky and myself chasing after him on the ATV's.

For the next few hours we wove between trees, around rocks and along a dozen paths that I had carved out while testing other vehicles. We were traveling at some ridiculous speeds,

our enhancements the only reason we weren't smashing into trees, boulders or each other. Eventually we switched up vehicles, with Steve taking an ATV Bucky in the buggy. After another hour we made our way back to range, covered in mud and dirty.

"The buggy was clearly faster," Steve said as Bucky hopped out of the buggy. "But the ATV's had it beat in maneuverability."

"That was the idea," I said with a nod, leading the two out of the garage, shutting the door behind us.

"The buggy was much more comfortable as well," Bucky pointed out. "My butt was getting sore after the first hour on the ATV."

"Hmm... I'll have to take a look at that," I said, making a mental note.

"So... why bother making these at all?" Steve asked as we stepped into the tent, dropping down on one of the chairs. "Last I heard you could fly at what, mach three?"

"Honestly? These are for fun," I said with a shrug. "Some of this stuff is a hobby, some of it is because I want to be prepared."

"Prepared for what?"

"Anything. The world is changing Steve, it's heading to something, I can feel it. I want to be ready for whatever it is," I explained, passing him and Bucky some water bottles from the fridge. "I know it sounds paranoid, but... weird stuff is happening more and more often. I mean look at you Steve, and you Bucky. Two best friends, super soldiers, separated during world war two and then reconnected in the modern era. How crazy is that? And then there is Iron Man, the Hulk, Asgardians, and that's just what we know of."

"I... guess it's hard for me to spot because this is all so new to me," Steve admitted, giving Bucky a look, who only shrugged. "But life did stop being normal for me when I was chosen for the super soldier program."

"Just keep it in mind. Weird is the new normal. And don't be afraid to call me in if there is something weird going on."

"You don't have to worry about that," Bucky responded. "You're already on the short list of people to call if shit stops making sense."

I chuckled and nodded, checking the time on my phone.

"Alright guys, it's about time I get back to the warehouse," I said standing and stretching. "I assume you want to go back to DC?"

A short while, and a few goodbyes later I traveled back to the warehouse. Ema was still gone, but I still had plenty to keep me occupied until she got back. With Tony due back I wanted to get some of my own projects done before we started collaborating again.