

Magically Marvelous

Chapter 11

“So all you have to do is carve some crappy symbols into something and it becomes stronger?” Tony asked as he hovered over Harry who was carving a rune into a piece of metal.

“It’s more complicated than that. The runes have to be nearly perfect and in the correct order. When they’re set, I pump magic into them to activate the rune cluster. When the cluster is activated, the effects will activate as well. One portion of the cluster is there to absorb small amounts of ambient magic from the environment so the enchantment can always stay active without running out of power,” Harry explained.

“So the power will never run out?” Tony wondered. Harry shook his head.

“If too much stress is put on it, it will overpower the runes and drain the magic from the piece. After that, the piece will have to rely on its normal strength,” Harry said, leaning down and blowing some metal scrapings from the inside of a spare piece from his next suit design. He examined the cluster to make sure it was all correct. Once sure, he pumped his magic into it and held it up for Tony’s inspection.

“It’s done?” he asked, flipping it over to take a closer look. Tony ran his fingers over the small, carved symbols that looked strangely beautiful. Harry nodded. “Time for testing!” he happily stated and carried it over to a large hydraulic press. He grabbed an identical armor piece that hadn’t been magically tampered with and placed it in the press. He grabbed a couple of pairs of safety glasses and tossed one to Harry while putting the others on. Tony then stepped back and pressed the big, red button on the extended remote. They watched as the top part of the press slowly lowered until it touched the armor piece. The press only hesitated for a moment before crushing the piece flat. Pressing the button again, the press lifted, revealing the flattened piece. Tony picked it up and examined it. “Catastrophic failure,” he said, tossing it on the holographic design table. Immediately, ghostly numbers hovered over it which Harry knew to be the data readings from the press.

Tony then added the magically enhanced piece of armor. Once again, he pressed the big, red button. Just as before, the top of the press lowered until it touched the identical piece. This time, however, the press stopped cold. It groaned for a moment but never ended up crushing the piece. When he pulled the piece from the press, he quickly examined it. “The paint is ruined ... but there isn’t a scratch on the metal plate ...” he said with excitement. “That press is rated at five hundred tons!” he added.

“Let me see,” Harry said, holding his hand out. He took hold of the piece and waved his hand at it. He concentrated on the sensation he was feeling. “That used up around five percent of the magical potential ... give or take a couple of percentage points.” He handed the piece back to Tony who was acting like a kid in a candy store.

“Have you thought about laser etching these runes?” Tony asked, pulling out a magnifying glass for a better look at the carving quality. “Laser etching is incredibly precise and much faster than doing it by hand.”

Harry thought about it for a moment before shrugging his shoulders. “I suppose that would work. The runes don’t need to be created by hand. I’ve never needed anything other than my hands though since I’ve never created anything on a large scale.”

“Jarvis! Have one ordered and delivered overnight if possible,” Tony called out.

“Of course, Sir,” the bodiless voice of Jarvis replied. Tony continued testing the piece of armor as Harry used Tony’s holographic table to bring up the schematics for his latest version of the Iron Man suit.

“Mark IV ...” Harry read. From the holographic picture floating and rotating above the fancy table, it appeared to be relatively similar in shape and size.

“It has a few upgrades, but nothing major. The new Biological Waste Disposal System is a must though,” Tony piped in.

“Your crowning achievement,” Harry snorted. “You know ... I can expand spaces. I can easily make a box the size of a matchbox hold as much as a large storage trunk.” Harry heard Tony go quiet.

“You’re shitting me?!”

“I swear on the new Biological Waste Disposal System that I’m not shitting you,” Harry promised, holding up his hand. “I should advise you to not put anything crucial to your survival in it. Just like with the magically enhanced armor, if damaged, the enchantments will break. If the expanded space implodes, everything inside will suddenly disappear, never to return.”

“That’s amazing!” Tony gasped, pushing Harry out of the way to use the table. He began pulling pieces of the holographic armor apart, throwing some pieces in the virtual trash. “That means more storage for bullets and missiles, medical supplies, food for long missions ...” Tony went on.

“For that, I’ll definitely need the laser thing,” Harry cut him off. It’s very hard to etch inside of such a small space. Harry went on to let him know that he could lighten certain parts to keep weight down. They spent a good portion of the day coming up with ideas to help upgrade his newest model of the suit. Late in the afternoon, Harry decided to leave for the time being, promising to come back when the laser engraving machine arrived.

After grabbing a hamburger, Harry hopped on his motorcycle just as the sun was setting and began patrolling his neighborhood, just like in the good old days. Things had cooled off a bit

since Mephisto had done a runner. Harry hoped that he would eventually get another crack at the demon-like weirdo. Even so, NYC was still a dangerous city with no shortage of scumbags to put in their place. After only an hour of driving around, he found a group of local gang members harassing passersby. When he saw the apparent leader slap an old guy on the back of the head, Harry actually smiled. That was all the reason he needed to act a fool. As the group laughed at their own foul antics, he revved the bike and drove down the street before pulling up next to them.

“Hey!” he called out. “Which one of you idiots can tell me how to get to Brooklyn?” he asked. The group suddenly stopped laughing, and the leader pushed through the small crowd and stood up to him while Harry continued sitting on his idling bike.

“What the fuck did you say?” he asked menacingly, hoping that he had heard right. He was looking for a bit of fun that night.

“I asked for directions to Brooklyn, dumbass,” Harry repeated.

“Maaaaan ... I’m about to put my foot in your ass!” he said, rubbing his fist, ready for a fight.

“Your foot?” Harry asked, confused.

“Yeah, my foot!”

“Which foot?” Harry asked.

“This one, Muthafucka!” he exclaimed, sticking out his foot.

BANG!

“YEEEEEEOW!” the leader yelled and dropped onto the floor, holding the foot that now had a hole in it. Harry smiled with his gun in hand, a wisp of smoke still leaving the barrel. The rest of the gang began reaching for their guns and knives while Harry peeled out and turned down the nearest alley.

“That’s a dead end!” one member said excitedly as they watched him turn the corner. “Let’s get him!” he cried out, cocking his handgun. They left their injured leader on the floor, holding his ruined foot while they ran down the street and turned the corner. As they went further down the alley, they noticed that no one was there.

“Where the fuck did he go?” one of the smarter members asked. A whistle from the alley entrance made them all quickly turn around. The man on the motorcycle was smiling at them. Before they could take any action, a pack of very angry dogs ran past him and right toward them. One of his friends lifted up his gun to fire only for a large mutt to grab hold of his arm. It shook its head back and forth violently, making his friend scream and drop his gun. He was so

shocked about what was happening to his friend that he never noticed a smaller but equally pissed-off dog bite his crotch. “AAAAAAAARRRRRRGH!” he screamed and tried to pull the dog free. However, its teeth were like vice grips.

Harry laughed as the gang ran out of the alley and right past him with the pack of conjured dogs chasing after them. Suddenly, the leader ran past him, hobbling along with a rabid chihuahua nipping at his heels. Harry lifted his handgun and carefully took aim. He squeezed the trigger and heard a loud pop of the gun followed by a scream as the gang leader was now clutching his ruined right buttock.

“Must you always cause trouble?” Natasha’s voice made him turn his head. Her lovely, smiling face met his gaze as she walked toward him, her curvy body looking amazing as she did so. The sway of her wide hips easily held his attention.

“Au contraire. I consider myself the protector of public decency ... the defender of the downtrodden ... a bastion of light in a city cloaked in darkness,” he said as the angry yelps of a chihuahua faded off in the distance.

“You think highly of yourself, don’t you?” she snorted and threw her leg over the back of his bike as she sat down behind him.

“Someone has to,” he smiled. “Tracked my location from my phone again?” he asked.

“Keeping you out of trouble is a full-time job,” she responded, smiling back. He revved the bike as she wrapped her arms around his waist. Soon after, they made their way back to Harry’s place to relax.

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Since the runes were so small, they didn’t have to wait long before each outer plating of the suit was etched. Harry pulled the last one out of the machine and sanded the runes with a scouring pad to clean it off. “Don’t forget, we need to do the same to every bolt and connector. The entire structure needs to be reinforced, if not, a piece of the plating could break free and be pushed straight into your chest,” Harry warned.

“I’d rather that not happen if you don’t mind ...” Tony said, grabbing every metal piece that would inevitably make up his new suit.

“Then start engraving,” Harry responded, infusing his magic into the freshly finished piece. Once done, he placed it in the finished pile with the others. While he waited for the next piece to finish, he went back to work on a small, metal box about the size of a deck of cards. The top would be able to mechanically slide open once it was installed in the Mark IV, providing the suit with dozens of shoulder-mounted, anti-armor mini-missiles. Once it was enlarged, Tony would design a loading mechanism that would perfectly fit inside. First, he needed the exact dimensions of the

box. For that, Harry needed to expand the space inside. Placing the box down on the table, he held his hand over it and began his long string of incantations. When the box glowed blue, Harry opened the box and activated the tiny rune cluster that had been laser-etched inside. After that, he finished the incantation and watched as the space inside expanded to over a hundred times its former dimensions. Harry whistled in appreciation when he saw the finished result. After a few tests, he was happy to find that the enchantment was stable. "Here you go!" Harry called out and tossed it to Tony.

Tony caught it and slid the top flap open. "Woah!" he gasped as he peered inside before placing it on the holographic table. The table was able to perfectly measure the inside dimensions of the box. Without another word, he began designing the loading mechanism that would be installed inside. Harry, meanwhile, continued engraving every single piece and then powering the runes as they came off the line. Since there were so many pieces, they didn't even come close to finishing that day. The next day was more of the same.

"I was wondering ... What other kinds of upgrades can you add to the suit? I'm already planning a Mark 4.1 version," Tony asked as they ate pizza in the workshop while the laser engraver continued to do its thing. Harry shrugged.

"It just depends on what you need. Cushioning Charms would probably be good. It adds a paper-thin layer between your body and the enchanted object to alleviate friction. It's most often used on seats to keep your ass from aching. Cooling Charms could help with overheating," Harry explained. They continued to brainstorm until Harry received a call from Fury.

"Yeah ... Yeah ... Got it. On my way," said Harry as he cut off the call. Harry suddenly stood up. "We've got to cut this short. I've got work tonight," Harry told Tony as he quickly packed his things.

"Really?" Tony asked, his interest piqued. "Anything good?" he asked.

"Don't know yet. Besides ... I couldn't tell you even if it was. I'm a top secret super spy, remember?" Harry smirked, rubbing it in. Tony was desperate for excitement and adventure. "I travel the world, seducing beautiful, young women while tricking them to give up all their secrets. HJ Potter ... License to Thrill!" Harry stated and silently Transfigured his clothes into a black tuxedo while whipping his gun out and holding it in a classic James Bond pose.

"Please," Tony snorted. "You're probably being sent to arrest some teenage shoplifters," he jealously retorted.

"Oh, my!" Pepper's voice made them both look over to the door. She was staring at Harry's form with slightly pink cheeks. Harry smirked even wider and walked over to the strawberry blonde.

"Pepper," he greeted her and took her hand. He brought it up to his lips and softly kissed the top of it. "You're as lovely as ever."

“Well I ... I mean ... Thank you, I suppose ...” she stuttered while her face began to heat up.

“Is there a reason for your visit,” an annoyed Tony asked.

“What?” she asked, clearly not hearing him as she and Harry stared into each other’s eyes while he gently toyed with the soft, delicate skin of her hand.

“Why are you here?!” he repeated louder.

“OH!” she squeaked and pulled her hand from Harry’s. Pepper cleared her throat and straightened her blouse. “I came to remind you that you have a doctor’s appointment in an hour. He’s making a house call to give you your annual prostate exam,” she told them.

“Well ... It looks like I’m not the only one getting some action tonight,” Harry teased Tony, smacking him on the shoulder. “Tony here will be dealing his very own Goldfinger ... or is it Brownfinger in this case?”

“Alright! Get the hell out of here!” Tony exclaimed, his face red and embarrassed as Harry snickered.

“Au revoir, Moneypenny!” Harry said, kissing Pepper on the hand one last time before he walked out of the door humming the James Bond tune. Once he was out of sight, he disappeared and made his way to the meeting spot.

About an hour north of New York City, Harry confidently walked inside a small mom-and-pop store that sold fishing supplies. There was a little, old man sitting behind a cash register that looked to have been made in the 1970s. He was watching Harry closely as he walked up to the counter. Harry rang the little handbell that was sitting on the countertop. “Are the trout biting today?” Harry asked. The combination of ringing the bell and asking that specific question told the man who Harry worked for. Even so, he kept the handgun in hand with his finger on the trigger underneath the counter.

“Not one bit,” he responded. Harry nodded and pressed a secret button underneath the counter. Holding the button down, he waited for the old man to press his button. Once he did, a secret door to the back room unlocked. When the old man heard the loud click of the door unlocking, he removed his hand from the gun and nodded. Without another word, Harry made his way to the back. As he pushed open the door, he saw Director Fury sitting there with Deputy Director Maria Hill by his side.

“Director ... Deputy Director,” Harry nodded as he greeted them. Harry had not had a lot of one on one time with Agent Maria Hill. She was usually in charge of the lower ranked Agents while Fury or Coulson dealt with him, Natasha, and Barton. Harry sat down and waited for them to begin.

“Potter ... We’ve got a problem,” Fury began. “Or more accurately, Agent Hill has a problem.”

“Oh?” Harry asked, raising an eyebrow. Maria had practically the entirety of SHIELD at her disposal. He wondered what problem she had that would force her to come to him. “What kind of problem?”

“A stalker problem,” Maria joined in. Harry wasn’t expecting that.

“A stalker?” he asked, confused. He looked back and forth between the pair. “From what I’ve been told, Agent Hill is a very capable woman. I’m surprised this stalker isn’t lying in a hospital bed with two missing kneecaps.”

“He would be if I could actually find him!” Maria snarled.

“The problem is that the stalker is practically a ghost. He follows Maria around and always seems to know where she is at. When we’re operating out of the west coast, he’s there ... When we’re on the east coast, he’s there,” Fury explained.

“Inside job? A member of SHIELD perhaps?” Harry asked.

“That was obviously our first thought as well,” Maria said. “However, no evidence has been found to suggest it. Either way, certain precautions have been taken.”

“Any time she sounds the alarm, he suddenly disappears. We haven’t even been able to capture any surveillance footage of him,” Fury added.

“What’s the reason for his behavior? Is he delusional and thinks he’s in love? Is he just a mental case?”

“He always leaves a single red rose after one of his ... let’s call them sessions. He calls often and repeatedly from burner phones and says nothing while breathing heavily,” Fury said. Maria cleared her throat, obviously embarrassed.

“He broke into my home the other day. Somehow, he evaded all of my alarms and ...”

“And what?” Harry asked.

“Stole all of my underwear,” she finished with an embarrassed sigh. “Last week, I was having lunch with an old friend who just happened to be male, and when I came home, my front windows were smashed and red paint was splashed all over the front door. My flower beds were all trampled. The neighbors heard the commotion and called the cops, but no evidence was found.”

"I added twenty-four-hour surveillance to her home, but we've been unable to get a single picture of him. Whoever he is, he's more than skilled enough to evade us. That makes me wonder ..."

"If he's a metahuman?" Harry finished. Fury silently nodded.

"Whoever or whatever he is and whatever his motivations are, we need to catch him ... and who better than another metahuman," Fury said, crossing his legs.

"So you want me to skulk around and hide in the bushes?" Harry asked, not really liking the sound of that.

"How you catch him is up to you," Fury said, standing up and straightening out his long, leather jacket. "Consider it another test of your burgeoning skillset. Maria will be working with you on this for obvious reasons. Keep me informed," he finished before walking out of the room, leaving him and Maria behind.

Both looked at each other before rolling their eyes simultaneously. Not wanting to waste any time, they immediately got to work.