

With a method of enhancing my body sorted I started working on my next project, impact absorption. I had made a note to take a crack at it ages ago, but hadn't tackled it yet because I had more important things to work on.

My armor protected me from bullets, piercing and some of the damage from impacts but they still rattled me around. I needed a way to absorb more kinetic energy to keep myself from being knocked around. After all, my amulet might heal bruises but if someone splatters my brain against the inside of my skull there isn't much it will be able to do.

"The problem is that cushioning is different from absorption." I explained as I brainstormed with Ema. "Cushioning is foam or foam like, and it would seriously throw off anything that I wove it into in any useful amount."

Deciding that the only way I was going to make any progress was by experimenting, I went out and did some more shopping. I visited a few cities, picking up a half dozen different materials, including two types of rubber and a few types of urethane polymers. I cut a few squares and combined them all together

"Huh... that's actually not bad." I said, examining the card, flicking it out onto the table. "If I thin it down with some cloth? Maybe a sports undershirt?"

"Not going to layer in magic?" Ema asked, floating around the table.

"No, I want to add it to my undersuit first, which I'm trying to keep magic free." I explained, already making plans in my head. "Alright, I need to-"

I was cut off by my cell phone ringing, the ringtone coming from a nearby bench. I quickly walked over and picked, checking the screen. It was Natasha.

"Hello?" I answered. "Is that you Natasha?"

"How quickly can you get to Dover?" She asked in a rush. Her tone was dire and rushed, sending a chill down my spine.

"Ema, how fast could I get to Dover?" I asked, looking over at her.

"Flying? If you start from Washington then maybe ten minutes?" She answered, turning to look at me. "Why?"

"Ten minutes." I repeated into the phone, slowly standing. "Why?"

"We found a bomb. It's timer is down to twelve minutes and twenty three seconds." She explained. "It's giving off some insane readings and we can't defuse it. It's locked up tight, sealed inside some sort of pressurized case. We... we don't know how big it's going to be but..."

there is a lot of energy here. We are evacuating nearby buildings but... our expert says there's not enough time for how big this is going to be."

"Natasha... do you have your mask?" I asked, my heartrate starting to pick up.

"Yes." She answered. "I'm standing next to the bomb."

"Put the mask next to it and evacuate." I said before turning to Ema. "Give me her compass."

"Maker..."

"Now!"

Silently she pushed out the compass connected to Natasha's mask, putting it in my hand. The second it was in my palm I traveled to Washington, already running. I deployed my armor as I ran through the halls of the abandoned building, smashing through a window and extending my wings. I flew straight up before focusing on the compass, turning myself so I was pointing to where the connection was before flapping my wings and rocketing across the sky.

"Natasha? Are you evacuating?" I asked through the bluetooth in my helmet.

"Maker, the specialist doesn't think its the kind of bomb you evacuate from." She explained, her voice soft.

"Fuck!" I cursed, straining to push my wings faster. "I'll be there soon, just hang on!"

Faster and faster I pushed, hitting the top speed of my wings almost immediately, focusing to keep it there. My heart thundered in my chest, knowing I was flying towards some sort of exotic bomb, rather than away. After two minutes I blasted past a waterfront, crossing the bay in less than another minute. Time and distance seemed to melt away as I focused on keeping precisely on target, the compass leading me directly to Natasha and the bomb.

When it pulled me down to a building I slowed down just enough to not be a smear on the ground, aiming for a second story window. I barely noticed the Shield vehicles and agents around the nearby buildings, hastily evacuating everyone. As I got closer to the building I aimed for the window and tucked my wings in.

I smashed through the window and the opposite wall like a living cannonball, battering myself in the process. I tumbled and quickly stood, already running down the hall full tilt. I smashed through a door, splintering the wood into chunks, hardly slowing down. I was now in some sort of lab, though it was tossed and mostly empty, with only basic lab equipment remaining on the countertops and shelves. Finally I made it to an opening in the wall, an entry torn through drywall.

I skidded to a stop inside the smaller room, finding three people. Two were holding hands, standing next to each other, obviously sharing a moment, and Natasha, who was standing alone, phone in her hand, which she dropped when I stepped in.

“Maker!” She said, stepping closer. “Only a minute twenty left...”

I nodded, stepping closer and examining the large box. My eyes locked on the stereotypical timer, counting down the remaining minute and fifteen seconds, before moving on to the rest. I could see the whole bomb in detail through the clear box, a large cylinder with a row of large clips attached to the side, each filled with a glowing blue energy. Despite that, I had no way of getting at anything due to the massive see through box surrounding it. I reached out and just barely touched the box with my finger, trying to pull it into a card... only for it to fail. Cursing loudly I looked around the box, my heart plummeting when I saw why I couldn't card it.

Four large bolts locked the see-through box to the floor, one on each corner.

“What happens if I cut the bolts?” I asked, looking back at Natasha, who immediately looked back at the other two people. The man stepped forward, bending down to look at the base.

“Uh uh well there isn't anything connected to the bolt.” He said in a Scottish accent. “But we would need something that can cut them that's thin enough to fit between the floor and the box, without breaking the pressure seal. Even then we don't have enough time to move it anywhere useful.”

I stopped listening and flicked out my sword cranking it to its full strength. I was about to drop to my stomach when I looked at Natasha, passing her the sword.

“This blows Coulson's knife out of the water. Cut the bolts and I'll keep pulling it.”

“Coulson's knife?” The man asked again. “Is that one of Maker's objects?”

“Fitz, that *is* Maker.” The woman said in a British accent, grabbing his arm and pulling him back. “It's also not the time!”

Natasha dropped down, laying on her stomach, gently sliding the sword in the thin gap, being extra careful not to cut the box. I watched as the sword cut through the thick bolt with a metallic slicing sound. She quickly moved and cut the second bolt before moving to cut the two on the other side.

“thirty five seconds!” The woman called out.

I watched as Natasha cut the fourth and final bolt, my hand pulling it into the deck before the sword was even free.

It *still* didn't budge.

"It's not working!" I called out, my voice cracking as the stress took its toll. "What else is—"

"It's got four more bolts!" The Scottish man called.

He rushed to Natsasha and dropped to his knees, taking the sword from her and jabbing it under the box, around the middle. The timer counted down from nine as he forced the sword right then left before shouting out.

"Now!"

I pulled again, this time the box disappeared into a card. I staggered and dropped to my hands and knees, the card fluttering to the ground beside me. The woman cheered and rushed to the man's side, hugging him as he sat back on the ground, his arms wrapping around the woman. I rolled over onto my back, feeling sick and wired, my adrenaline wreaking havoc on my body. Natasha sat down beside me, listening as the woman's cheering turned to soft tears, her own adrenaline fading. I closed my eyes and waited for my heart to stop trying to bust its way through my chest.

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Twenty minutes later I was on the front steps of the building. I was relatively calm, having managed to hold back the nausea from my fading adrenaline. I had called Ema to tell her I was okay. Her response had been curt and short, which only made me nervous about what she would be like when I got back. She did say she was going to take one of the landing pads and get to St. Louis since she would likely have a few hours on her hand.

Natasha had explained the situation fully after that. Apparently the building had been a Hydra lab before Shield had driven them to their current hiding spots. She was there to assist in clearing it out, looking for any useful information when Leo Fitz, the Scottish man, had picked up some anomalous readings through the wall. Some quick demo later and they found the hidden room. They were incredibly lucky that Fitz stumbled into it, because if they hadn't the bomb would have gone off before anyone even knew it was there. Currently he and his partner, who I now knew was Jemma Simmons, were sitting quietly not far away, holding hands.

Natasha, who was leaning against the handrail a few feet away, looked cool and collected. I did catch her hand shaking for a moment, which she hid by gripping the rail behind her tightly.

“Maker, Widow.”

I started as Nick Fury spoke, not a few feet away. I hadn't noticed him coming, and my hand had instinctively reached down to my hip.

“Impressive flight time Maker. Not quite as fast as Stark but still impressive.”

“Give me some time, I'll make it happen eventually.” I responded with a shrug. “You're lucky I went to Stark when I did, or I would have been stuck at one seventy.”

“...” He looked at me, taking a long pause as everyone came to terms with how close we had been to death, before looking at Natasha. “You alright?”

“I'm fine sir.” She said reflexively. “Just glad Maker made it in time.”

“Right. Well I need to confirm that you've destroyed the card Maker, then you're all free to go.” He said. “I think some time off is in order after that.”

“I can't.” I said simply, summoning the card to my hand. “I need the bomb to make a tracking tablet. Who knows how many they might have scattered around the country. Unfortunately I'm not sure how I can do that with this card. It's...”

I focused on the card, picking through its concepts with my mind. Oddly enough the fact that it was seconds away from detonating was detectable through its concepts, as was several bomb related things. It also felt horrifically powerful.

“...Contaminated. Strange energy coming from it though.”

Fury considered me for a moment before nodding.

“If I can get you a pure sample of the energy, could you make something to find it?” He asked.

“Most likely.” I responded. “Do you have more samples?”

“That's classified.” He answered, before looking at the other two. “Dr. Fitz, Dr. Simmons, you both take as much time as you need.”

His piece said, the Director of Shield turned in place and began walking away, stopping to look behind at Natasha and me.

“You two coming?”

We shared a look before standing and following the stern man, through the crowds of people to some sort of air vehicle that was landed in the middle of the street. It was stocky, with a cargo bay in the back and twin turbines built into the wing. We climbed up a small ramp into the cargo bay, which closed behind us.

“Rendezvous back with the helicarrier.” Fury said to the pilot, who nodded and started working the control panels in front of him.

The jet vehicle took off as Fury sat down on one of the rows of seats that sat on each side of the cargo bay. He leaned back in the seat as Natasha sat down opposite of him. I stayed standing, holding on to one of the hand holds on the ceiling.

“I need you to tear the card Maker.” Fury said eventually. “The security council will have my head if I don’t confirm it.”

I summoned the card again and showed it to him, using it as an excuse to study its concepts again. It was obviously a bomb, it had such a powerful destruction concept in it that it dwarfed anything I had carded so far, to an incredible degree. It also had an energy concept that was bafflingly hard to pin down. It was exotic, not something I really knew how to describe. It was potent though, and would have magnified the bombs power a dozen times over.

With a simple movement I tore the card in half, the remnants dissolving into dust. I couldn’t help but chuckle darkly at a thought, shaking my head to myself.

“What is it?” Natasha asked, looking a bit worried.

“Well if you guys wanted real proof doing that destroys the object, you have it now. I answered with a shrug. “You wouldn’t be able to miss that type of explosion, at least not if it was on Earth or even nearby.”

The interior of the aircraft went silent after that, save for the sound of the engines. Eventually Natasha looked over at me.

“Why wings?” She asked, the corners of her lips turning up in just the barest of smiles.

“Quirk of how my power works... Which I’m now realizing I’m going to have to reveal in order to make the tracking device.”

“I won’t force you to.” Fury said, his arms crossed. “The Security Council probably wouldn’t even be annoyed if I didn’t. You built up a lot of credit with giving us an edge over Hydra.”

“Does that include taking whatever energy samples you have to my own workshop?” I asked, chuckling when Fury shook his head. “Then I’ll need you to gather a bunch of things for me. My process is material intensive.”

I listed off a few dozen things, which Fury compiled into a message and sent off. He kept his face blank but I could tell he was confused about what I needed.

“How is the Hydra hunt going anyway?” I asked, looking between the two members of Shield.

“We have cut down two of the three gathering points in America.” Fury answered. “Steve, his team and the enhanced squad are preparing to take down the last one as we speak.”

“What about overseas?” I asked.

“Other countries are working their way through the larger gathering points with our assistance.” Natasha answered. “But it’s slower going. Shield has always had a... stronger presence in the US, in most other countries is a much larger give and take. It’s going to take years to clean up the countries that actively dislike our involvement.”

“Well just let me know if you want more tablets.” I said. “They aren’t difficult to make, especially because I’m sure you have access to plenty of samples.”

“What kind of resources do you need?” Fury asked, already pulling out his phone. I listed out a dozen or so things that I needed for each one, getting an odd look.

“What?” I asked after a moment, suddenly annoyed by his look.

“We suspected that any mystic aspect you hinted at was simply a smoke screen.” Fury said diplomatically. “But this list...”

“You’re just going to have to be patient.” I said with a shrug, getting a chuckle out of Natasha. “I’ll show you when we get to the Helicarrier.”

“You seem awfully fine with revealing a secret you’ve kept for a while now.”

“Well you guys have been scouring your agents for what, three, four days now?” I pointed out. “I bet Shield is the most secure it’s been in decades, not even including Hydra.”

“You wouldn’t tell us because of moles?” Fury asked skeptically.

"I wouldn't tell you because I wasn't ready for whatever heat would come from everyone knowing." I responded, correcting him after a moment. Why did my brain feel slow? "I'm still hoping to keep it a secret, but I know I can survive if it stops being a secret."

"...We will set up a secure room." Fury said after a moment.

"Good. Every advantage I get to keep means a potential trick I get to call on when I need it. Occasionally that will happen when you need it too." I pointed out. "Speaking of my tricks benefiting you, any complaints from the squad I equipped?"

"None, though they got a bit over confident in their first mission, resulting in one of them breaking their foot."

"Let me guess, they kicked something too hard?" I guessed, getting a nod from Fury.

"One of them attempted to kick a reinforced door down and shattered a few bones in their foot."

"Yeah, that's one of the reasons I've held off on more strength upgrades for myself." I explained. "I'm stronger, not tougher. It's something I'm working on."

"Could have done with a warning." Fury said, looking at me with annoyance.

"I... No that's fair, it didn't occur to me." I admitted, rubbing the back of my head. "I learned the lesson the hard way the first time I managed to enhance my strength. If I hadn't also just finished making my healing amulet I would have likely been in some trouble."

"Well they learned that lesson as well."

"Right... Well as an apology... how would you like to have depth perception again?"