

Ema and I spent the next hour gathering everything I thought I could need for my latest task. I carded two UCMs, a building improver and four connected copies of my large production machine. The four LPM's were my latest version of the device, which I had just finished perfecting for the lunar research base. Before I carded them I made sure I had the scanner for the LPM's in a separate card.

While I was working on that, Ema started to gather and stock the heavily armored, completely reorganized storage shed. What was once a place to keep dozens of the same thing, or left over materials from old projects was now a place to keep thousands of single items, from a dozen different kinds of feathers to gems and stones of various types and value. All of this so that I could easily duplicate anything that I needed. It also had an extensive system of expanded storage, meaning things that took a while to copy, or things I used a lot like magic rods or ultra metal, vibranium or just normal capacitors were ready when I needed them. Between this storage shed and my cabinet of tricks I had access to almost anything I could need.

While Ema finished checking the storage shed, I flicked out the anti mind control spell that I had absorbed from the Ancient One. I spent a few minutes studying it in detail, parsing out the concepts as deep as I could go.

As far as I could tell there was no leaking of influence or negative side effects, which was good considering how often it sounded like the members of the Ancient One's group used it. It was stable, efficient and as long as it was powered would prevent and clear up any source of outside mental influence on the caster.

Eventually I planned on refining, distilling and sinking the concept of general anti mind control into something I could add without having to worry about contaminating anything, but for now I needed something quick.

I grabbed a metal cuff and combined it with some multi stacked rechargeable batteries, a few capacitors along with some small but efficient solar panel cells. When that was all done I added in one of the spells, then a second one before scanning it with the universal scanner to check for any hidden problems. After it came up clean I secured the strange looking but functional device around my wrist.

"Notice anything different?" Ema asked, having finished the packing.

"...No, not that I can tell," I responded, focusing for a moment before shrugging. "Alright, let's grab everything and head down to New York."

I quickly carded the storage shed, checked through the deck a final time before traveling with Ema down to an abandoned parking lot in New York. The landing pad was tucked into a small hidden space created by two different buildings being built too close together.

Before long we were driving through the city in my incognito truck, making our way to Bleecker Street.

“So, any idea why the Ancient One didn’t bring up where you are from?” Ema asked as we were stopped at a red light. “From the way she described her job it sounded like she would be able to tell.”

“Well... She could have just decided not to mention it,” I responded, checking my rear view mirror. “Though I have to admit I don’t think that’s likely. I get the feeling they draw a much harder line than that when it comes to... foreigners.”

“So what, you just managed to sneak through?”

“That... I don’t think that’s it either,” I said with a shrug, hitting the gas as the light turned green. “Not entirely at least. I think that whatever entity put me here is either just an out of context problem so they have no idea it happened, or they are so far above this universe’s league in terms of power that they have no idea I’m not supposed to be here.”

“So they just assume you’re a normal person, who happened to inherit the Deck?”

“She did say, truthfully I should point out, that they didn’t start watching me until I started using magic in my builds. That means I wasn’t on their radar at all before that point.”

“Okay, well lets hope this isn’t some sort of elaborate trap.”

I shook my head and continued driving, eventually pulling up to the address and finding a parking spot. The Sanctum itself looked relatively normal, with green copper roofing and brick walls with concrete accents. Really, the only thing off about the building itself was a slightly strange looking window on the very top floor. That said, I assumed there was some sort of perception filter on it, because while the building might look mostly normal, I recognized the symbol in the circular window from the comics and I knew for a fact that I had driven past this at least once since I arrived here.

Ema and I walked up the front steps and knocked on the blue double doors. They opened immediately, a man in a set of sleeveless monk robes of some sort standing on the other side.

“Maker?” He asked simply, before looking behind me at Ema. “And Emerald?”

“That’s us,” I answered simply.

“Follow me,” He said, before turning around and leading us into the building, the doors shutting behind us.

The rather buff looking fellow led me deeper into the building, down a hallway to the left of the entrance, ignoring the grand staircase directly in front of it. Eventually we arrived at some impressive looking doors, which were already opened. There, waiting for us by an ornamental plinth on a small platform, was the Ancient One. Above her was a large globe of blue and gold, carved into an exact model of earth and further behind and to the side of her were two more large doors, each carrying a sigil similar too but different from the one embedded in the New York Sanctum's window.

"Greetings Maker, Emerald, I'm glad you could join us," She said with a small knowing smile, before looking up at the globe. "This globe is directly tied to the barrier projected by the Sanctums. It's how we monitor and, very rarely, adjust them. As you build the remaining four sanctums I will be here, along with several other masters, weaving the new structures into the existing spell."

As she talked she put her hands on the plinth, spinning some sort of disk on the top, the globe reacting as she did. Slowly bits and spots began to glow, marking out what I was pretty sure were population clusters.

"The three Sanctums that already stand are centered in areas with high ambient sorcerous power," She explained, three small glowing circles popping up. "These now lay in New York, Hong Kong and London. While Agamoto chose these spots as the most powerful locations, they are not the only options."

The three original floating orange circles are joined by four more, one over the south coast of Africa, another over California, one over the east coast of Australia, and a final one over the southeast coast of Brazil.

"We have already purchased suitable locations in Brisbane, Los Angeles, Lagos and São Paulo. All you have to do is use your creations to build Sanctums in each of these spots. As you build each one we will tie it into the protective barrier.

"Alright, that seems like a solid plan," I agreed, studying the map for a moment before continuing. "Is there any way I can build one and have you guys not connect it immediately?"

"I suppose we could put off connecting it and redirect the energies back into the Earth. Why?"

"Because you want me to improve the structure of the Sanctums too, right?" I asked, getting a nod in return. "Well in order to do that I will be messing with the materials used to make it, and who knows what that will do to it. It's better to play it safe and keep one separate so we can experiment. I would like to make the first one as an exact copy which I would then improve, with you monitoring it to make sure everything is safe. Once we have an upgrade pattern that works, we apply it to the originals and use it as the pattern for the other three new ones right off of the bat."

"I understand, and your caution is appreciated," The Ancient One said with a nod. "When will you be able to begin the process?"

"Well first we need to scan one of the Sanctums into my large production machine," I answered, looking back at the still open door to the New York Sanctum. "Which one do you want to copy?"

"Oh, they are all the same," She assured me. "They are capable of shifting their exterior look to fit into the time period, if the Sanctum Master tied to it at the time commands it."

"Oh, good, that makes everything easier," I said, looking around the room. "Is there somewhere you would consider the heart or center of the Sanctums? It probably won't make a difference but I should start the scan there just to make sure."

The Ancient One nodded and led us back through into the New York Sanctum, guiding us through a twist of hallways I'm pretty sure were impossibly angled, before stopping at a normal sized but heavily armored door. Every inch of the wall it was set in, as well as the metal door itself, were carved with some sort of runic script, every letter of which was faintly glowing orange, pulsing out and in from the door itself.

The Ancient One put her hand on the door of black metal and the rune script glowed brightly for a moment before going mostly dark, a loud sound of unlocking metal bolts echoing down the hall.

We stepped inside the room, Ema following right behind me. The room itself was mostly empty, the walls etched in the same runes as the exterior wall was. In the center of the room were four pillars that connected the floor and ceiling, each one glowing in a slow pulsing orange. In the center of the four pillars was a singular deep red cluster of crystals that was probably around four feet tall. It had three main growths with several smaller chunks branching from them, and every inch of the crystal was covered in carved runes, with each letter filled with some sort of golden metallic inlay. The entire room had an inverse Clarke tech vibe that felt potent and heavy.

"This is the Sanctum Spinel, the heart of the Sanctum. Each location has an almost identical crystal in its heart."

"...Holy hell... A spinel of that size... Where on Earth did you find it?" Ema asked, stepping closer around me, walking around the four pillars. "It... there is no way to attach a value to this. It's literally priceless beyond imagination."

"Agamotto and his students pulled them from the ground in southern Asia. It took an entire month of constant casting, alternating between each of them," The Ancient One explained, watching my partner. "Do not cross between the pillars."

“Will it react poorly to being scanned?” I asked, flicking the scanner out of its card.

“No, I have already turned that off.”

I nodded and began scanning the massive crystal with my scanner, the red beam of my handheld device trailing across the red surface of the spinel. It only took a few seconds of scanning before the device threw back an error.

“Yeah, the scanner is having a hard time parsing your magic. It's different and strange enough that it doesn't have any context,” I explained, regarding the scanner. “And if the scanner can't recognize it then the LPM probably won't be able to make heads or tails of it anyway.”

“But you can fix that.” The old sorceress stated confidently.

“I can, but I'm going to need some things. A place to work, access to books, sorcerers, enchanted objects...”

“Very well, you may set up a temporary workshop in Kamar-Taj and I will assign you a guide. As fascinating as your ability is, I am afraid I must attend to the preparations.”

“Of course, no rest for the wicked I guess.”

The Ancient One led us back through the Sanctum, through the hub room and out into a larger area. The rooms were old but well maintained, and followed a style I couldn't quite put my finger on, but seemed heavily inspired by Asian influences. Our powerful guide stepped up to and pushed open a large set of doors, revealing a large courtyard populated with dozens of people going about their day, all dressed in stylized robes of different kinds.

“Welcome Maker, to Kamar-Taj, home of the Masters of the Mystic Arts,” She said with a bit of ceremony.

As we looked over the open area and the people in it, one man stood out as he crossed the courtyard and made his way up the steps towards us. He silently bowed to the Ancient One before turning and nodding to Ema and I.

“Master Wong will be able to assist you in anything you need, he is a powerful sorcerer and has been a member of the Masters of the Mystic Arts for many years.”

“It is good to meet you, Maker,” He said with a rather blank face. “If you are ready I will take you to an empty courtyard where you can begin your work.”

“Sure...How did you know we were coming, or what I would need?” I asked, watching as the stoic man simply turned and left.

I turned to look back at the Ancient One, only to find she was already gone.

“Oh she better not make a habit of that,” I said, shaking my head as I walked down the steps two at a time to catch up with Wong, Ema right behind me.

“I didn’t see her leave either,” Ema commented.

Eventually the sorcerer brought us to a decent sized area, with space enough for what I needed. After pushing out my storage shed and the two UCM’s I turned to him, catching his attention.

“That was impressive,” He said. “Watching your artifact in action is fascinating.”

“Yeah, it takes a while to get used to,” I admitted. “Alright, we are going to start by testing the UCM’s, then-”

“The what?”

“Those machines. They scan and duplicate things,” I explained, gesturing to the S ranked devices that had pushed my simple crafting to insane levels all those months ago. “We need to find out if they can copy your brand of enchantment and magic. If they can’t then I’ll need to fix that first.”

“What do you need?” He asked, stepping closer to the two machines, examining the rune inscribed, filigreed machine.

“A few enchanted things, ranging from simple up, specifically things that you guys can make in case something goes wrong,” I explained, continuing after he gave me a look. “I don’t think anything will, I imagine the worst thing that will happen is an error message. But I’m dealing with new things so it’s best to be sure.”

After a moment Master Wong nodded and promptly left, leaving Ema and I alone. We shared a look and I shrugged, going back to my stuff. I pushed out a solid metal table, a few chairs and a medium sized party tent up over everything, all of which I had enhanced and prepared for an occasion just like this.

After a few minutes Wong returned carrying a small stack of books, with one other person following behind him, both of them carrying wooden boxes. Both of the sorcerers froze when they saw the party tent. For a moment they didn’t move, until Wong spotted me inside. He shook his head when he saw my smirk, stepping closer and under the tent. He placed his cargo on the metal table, the other sorcerer following suit. The unnamed, silent sorcerer gave Master Wong a small bow before quickly leaving.

“Is all of this necessary?” He asked, looking up and around at the interior of the tent, where several lights hung, illuminating the space perfectly.

“I don’t know, so it’s best to be prepared,” I answered with a shrug. “So what did you bring me?”

Wong nodded and turned to the wooden boxes, unpacking four different items. He closed and stacked the two boxes before picking up the first item, a small brass cylindrical cap on the end of a short wooden rod. The majority of the brass cylinder was filled with hundreds of hexagonal holes, each no bigger than a dime. It would look like a brass mace if not for the fact that the metal on the end was clearly just a brass sheet.

“This is an illuminant. It provides light,” He explained simply, gripping the stick and pushing a small handle around the base of the metal cylinder. A constant warm light began emanating from the center of the brass cylinder, getting brighter and brighter as he turned the handle.

“It can also flash brilliantly as a blinding attack, but the light will not return for a little over a minute.”

“Why not just use a flashlight?” I asked, trying to show my genuine curiosity.

“There are several mystical ways to interfere with electricity. Many powerful creatures do it on their own without even trying.”

I nodded and held out my hand, Master Wong placing the mystical torch in it without a word. I pulled it into the deck immediately, flicking out the card and examining it. It felt slightly similar to the anti mind control spell the Ancient one had given me, though only superficially. I could tell its simple intent, feel the eldritch magic inside and could even tell that this already had a power source, though it would eventually run out if it wasn’t charged.

I pushed the illuminant back out into my hand and set it down in the scanning section of one of the UCM’s before examining the interface screen. The machine didn’t seem to have any issue with recreating the mystic flashlight, so I tapped on the screen, set it to create a single copy. Before taking a step back.

“What’s next?” Wong asked, his voice still stoic.

“Next we wait,” I answered with a shrug. “It’s gonna take ten minutes to print out the copy, then you can take it away to be examined. After that we run a few more tests with whatever else you brought.”

“And then what?”

“And then the fun begins,” I responded, plopping down in one of the chairs I had brought with me. “We start teaching the large production machines how to read and build eldritch magic stuff, so we can scan the Sanctum. Now sit down, you're making me nervous.”