

Chapter 34 - Magic

The next morning was spent on one long shopping trip across multiple cities. I jumped from store to store buying makeup, clay, masks and everything else I needed to make three face changing masks, two for Natasha's and one for Ema. After that I had to travel to Texas to another metal stock shop, one who happened to have a supply of nitinol. I ended up buying all of the nitinol they had, which turned out to be a bunch of spools of wire and a large stack of sheets, as it was too useful to pass up. While I was there I also bought a bunch more titanium, molybdenum aluminum and tungsten. I ended up storing it all, along with all of the metal I had left over, at the quarry, covered with a large tarp, which I also had to buy.

After that I visited a Walmart in Illinois to buy everything I needed to make more transformation cards as well as a bunch of new stuff for the quarry in an attempt to make working there more comfortable. I bought some sturdy tables, a large party tent, a bunch of large storage bins, some comfortable furniture and a ready to build storage shed. I left Ema at the quarry after she volunteered to set it all up while I continued shopping.

I went to a jewelry store in New York next, buying four pieces of jewelry, two size five rings, a locket necklace with a magnetic latch and a bracelet, all simple designs as I'm pretty sure Black Widow was a fan of understated elegance more than extravagance. I ended up getting two simple rings for myself as well, having decided to make two hold out guns for myself in case I was ever disarmed. Finally on a whim I bought a variety of relatively cheap jewelry, all of it simple and as unisex as possible since jewelry that heavily leaned towards women tended to have a for women concept. I ended up spending forty thousand dollars on random jewelry of various types.

After I was done finding what I needed for Black Widows projects I started shopping for my next big one, the danger sense. After some thinking I separated it into a two part project. Step one was figuring out a way to separate the magic from the electricity I got from absorbing my lightning gun. Magic was proving to be a massive game changer, functioning as some sort of bridge between concepts, smoothing out issues in general. I tried to come up with a few ideas to separate them but only came up with one. The upside was that I didn't need to buy anything to test that theory, I already had what I needed.

The second part of my project was where I would actually be making something. I needed to cobble together the concepts to form the framework for danger sense, which the simplified magic could then form into actual danger sense.

Hopefully.

I bounced around New York City and Austin, buying things like motion sensors, glass breaking sensors, heart rate monitors and security cameras. I bought smoke and carbon dioxide

sensors, civilian geiger counters and replacement impact sensors for cars. I also spent a few hours trolling through book stores, managing to find three kids books about avoiding dangerous things, a book on cold reading, two books about subconscious instincts and gut feelings and one book about how to identify risks. My final stop was a crystal shop in Illinois, where I bought chunks of labradorite, azurite, fluorite, sodalite and lapis lazuli, all stones supposedly related to intuition and insight. I also grabbed a bag full of leather bands, meant to be worn around your arm or bicep, though that wouldn't stop me from wearing it on my legs.

When I was finally done shopping for the day it was a few hours past noon. I traveled back to the apartment, grabbed all leftovers from previous builds and traveled back to the quarry. Ema had already finished setting up the shed and the tent, so I helped her set up everything else, putting most of the leftovers in storage boxes, putting those, as well as all of the green gun crates into the shed.

As a test I carded the shed, which made me a bit unsteady and bleary eyed for a moment before I recovered. I pushed the shed right back out before going inside and grabbing some of what I needed for Natasha's project, with Ema following to grab the rest.

To make sure I remembered the recipe correctly I quickly whipped up another face changing mask. After checking to make sure it worked as well as it felt it would I handed it to Ema, who instead of using it stored it inside herself, already setting up her default states to store and keep the mask and her ring of archery ready.

With the recipe now fresh in my mind I started over, this time doing my best to make two at once. It was relatively easy and by the end of it I had two masks that were tied even closer together than the landing pads and Bifrost vambrace were. I would have been worried if I ever planned on using the extra for anything other than keeping track of Natasha. The last step was taking one of the extra compasses and combining it with an on off switch before combining it to the spare mask. It did little to change the mask save make it a little bronze in color and add four arrows around the edges. I added a second before it finally shifted shape, becoming a compass like device.

I examined the still normal looking mask and couldn't tell any difference from my usual one, it worked the exact same way as far as I could tell. The only difference was that conceptually it was connected to another object, and even that had weakened slightly. Still, the second you picked up the compass-like object, now only a faint brass color, you could immediately tell where the mask was.

"Alright, only one last hurdle." I said, reaching over and grabbing one set of Natasha samples.

"Are you worried the bonding will sever the grouping?" Ema asked as looked up from the glock magazines she was loading.

I nodded and quickly bonded the mask to her, pushing it back out into my hands. The mask was a perfect replication of Natasha's face in white porcelain, but nothing else about it changed. I had half expected there to be a Black Widow symbol somewhere but other than the shape of the mask there was nothing different. Mentally crossing my fingers I picked up the compass, pumping a fist when I could clearly feel the mask.

"Alright Ema, I'm putting you in charge of this. You don't need to always have it on but I need you to check it frequently. I don't think they would call our bluff, not after what I've been making, but you never know."

Ema nodded and stretched out her arm to accept the compass, pulling it back and storing it inside her chest, finishing the last few mags before standing and carrying them over to me. I combined seven glock magazines together, resulting in a single mag that carried a hundred and nineteen rounds, seemingly managing to avoid the wall of diminishing returns. Still, having a pistol weigh exactly the same but carrying a hundred rounds was impressive. I repeated the process to get a second mag of the same size.

After I was done making the magazines I examined the guns themselves. They had given me six of them, all modified slightly. The sight was raised so that a silencer wouldn't block them, the mag well had a fluted attachment for easier reloading and the trigger was modified in a way I didn't recognize, which probably meant it wasn't commercially available.

Finally, when I was done examining the pistols I pulled out three of the glock silencers, combining them together and screwing it on the end of the gun. I repeated this process to produce an identical pistol with identical specs. I took one and walked to the edge of the lake pit, quickly firing off a half dozen shots. They were incredibly quiet. Not quite silent, but they were much quieter than any one silencer could normally get. I shook my head though and headed back to the work bench, combining a fourth and final silencer to each one. This time the pistol barely made a sound. Of course the bullet still went supersonic, but that wasn't my problem. If Natasha wanted to use subsonic ammo that was on her to take care of.

Once the pistols were all set, and Ema had started loading up the spare P90 mags, I started making the transformation cards. First I went home and made a double batch of oobleck, bringing it back to the quarry when I was done. Instead of using the whole thing I only carded two handfuls, immediately combining them together. From there I added three sheets of nitinol and two umbrellas. The result was a more metallic version of the transformation card. I grabbed one of the pistols, reattached the silencer and carded it as well before carding and combining one of the simple gold rings with the transformative card. Finally, the last step was combining the gun with the ring.

I pushed the resulting ring out of its card and turned it in my hands. It looked like a simple golden ring, almost exactly the same as the original, the only difference being a small, flush and very hard to spot button. I smirked and held out my hand, pressing it with my thumb. The ring began to shift and unfold, black metal and ooze pushing from it and forming the gun in

my hand. In all it took about a second or so for the gun to form, silencer and all. With a smirk I walked back to the edge of the pit and fired down into the water below.

Satisfied that the gun still functioned I inspected it and found a button on top of the slide. I pressed it and the gun folded and slid back into the ring, still on my finger. This process took a full five seconds, an interesting difference that I couldn't really figure out. After pressing the button on the ring again I took off the silencer and fired it off into the water again. Then I pulled out the magazine and attempted to store the pistol without reattaching the silencer or putting the mag back in its place, only to find the button wouldn't shift in the slightest. I put everything back together and the button activated fine, the gun storing away easily.

After confirming that the process worked I repeated it for the P90, with a few differences. The P90 magazine expanded until I had used all of the spare mags they sent, ending up with a whopping five hundred and thirty five rounds, diminishing returns making the last few combinations a bit weak. I also stacked a muzzle brake for the P90 instead of a suppressor. A quintuple stacked muzzle brake brought the muzzle flip down to almost nothing. I even took my deployable armor and strength cuff off to test it and had no problem controlling it at all. The final touch was a red dot sight mounted on top. A quick combination chain got me another metal transformation card. The final result was a bracelet with a small button on a little oval plate.

The AWM did get a modified suppressor, making it whisper quiet, though I ended up having to use five for the larger rifle. Unfortunately the AWM's magazine only got up to thirty one rounds as it held a concept of being small that seemed to trigger the diminishing returns almost immediately. After that there wasn't much else I could do to the rifle without starting to improve it in more esoteric ways. I was tempted to make her a super scope or make it super armor piercing but Ema held me back. So I finished off Natasha's order with a transformative card turning the powerful sniper rifle into a simple locket necklace that she could pull off with a tug. I left the locket empty, despite the temptation to include a picture of Tony Stark as a joke.

The last part of the project was to bond each of the items to Natasha. For a moment I paused, wondering if the binding would carry over to the guns if I applied it to the rings. Deciding that it was more important to bind the guns than it was to bind the rings, as it would be possible for someone to take the guns once she had deployed them. I quickly deployed and bound all of the guns before running into a bit of a roadblock. Since the guns, now a darker black with the black widow symbol on the grip, were bound to Natasha, I couldn't activate the transformation back into rings. Frowning, I eventually just carded them as they were.

After I finished with Natasha's project I quickly rushed through two rings of my own. I resisted the urge to make two massively overpowered weapons knowing I had plans to make what would hopefully be my primary weapons soon. Instead I enlarged the magazine, added a flashlight and a quad stacked suppressor and a raised red dot sight to a quad stacked 1911A. I added a wheel selector switch which let me adjust just how much harder the bullets hit. I purposely left it at its lowest setting, which was on the same level of a normal pistol. After I was satisfied with my first back up gun I turned it into a ring for my right hand.

Happy with how my back up pistol turned out I pulled out four Benelli M4s from my shed and carried them to my work bench. After setting them down I sat back in my chair, my lips pursed.

“What's the problem?” Ema asked when she realized I had stopped working.

“I'm trying to figure out how to extend the magazine in a gun that has an integral magazine. These are the military versions so it has a seven round magazine but I want to improve that.”

“Load it before you combine them.”

I sagged a bit and groaned, slapping my forehead as I grabbed a few boxes of slugs and started loading the first shotgun. It took me a few minutes to get them all stacked up but once I was done I quickly combined them together.

“Thanks Ema.” I said as I combined the wheel selector switch to the shotgun before quickly turning it into a ring for my left hand.

When I was done I spent a few minutes getting used to my two new guns, especially how they acted when I deployed them. When I was satisfied I walked back to the work bench and bonded the guns to myself. After I was done I leaned back in my chair, more than a little tired. The sun was slowly descending as I sat and decompressed. Ema, who had been switching between flying around the quarry and hanging out with me after she was done filling magazines, flew over to me and bobbed around my head and shoulders.

“So, you mentioned you have an idea on how to pull the magic from the magical electricity?” She asked eventually, letting me unwind for a few minutes.

“Yeah, I have one theory to test.” I answered, going over to one of the crates containing extra materials. “Basically what if we combined the magic electricity with something that discharges electricity?”

“I... I don't follow.”

“Alright, just hold on a second.”

I pushed out my lightning gun, and grabbed some of the largest capacitors I have from a box of leftovers and extras. I put on my electrical resistance ring and snagged a card of the magic electricity and combined it with a capacitor. The result was a capacitor that contained magic and electricity, which I had already expected. I grabbed a scrap of metal from a box and tapped it against the capacitor's prongs. A bright spark arked for a split second, disappearing just as quickly. I carded the capacitor and frowned, pushing it from the card immediately.

“No change.” I explained before Ema could ask. “Still a capacitor for magic and electricity, just empty.”

I leaned back in my chair, going over my admittedly limited knowledge of electricity and what I knew about how concepts worked. My theory seemed like a bust, but honestly I knew so little about electricity past the “Zap, ouch!” part I couldn't be sure.

“I need to know more about how batteries and capacitors work.” I said before looking at Ema. “Do you want to come back with me or stay here? I won't be long.”

“I'll stay and keep an eye on everything, maybe start packing up all the guns.” She volunteered. “You are done with the guns for today right?”

I nodded and traveled home, sitting down on the couch and pulling the laptop closer. It took me a few minutes to find a good video, but eventually I sat back and started to watch. I quickly realized that while a lot of this made sense, it was clearly not going to help me. I clicked on another video, not really listening as I thought, until I saw someone driving a spike into the ground. I rewinded the video and watched it from the beginning. He was driving in something called a grounding rod. Something specifically designed to ground out electricity, dissipating it into the ground.

I rushed out the door and into the night, spending an hour rushing through a few hardware stores buying copper grounding rods before finding a quiet corner to travel back to the quarry. I removed the wire clamp from a rod, grabbed eight capacitors and combined them together quickly. With a wide grin I shocked myself a dozen times, immediately combining the resulting card into the octuple capacitor before grabbing a grounding rod, carding it and combining it with the super charged capacitors... only to frown when it still held strong electrical and magic concepts.

Frustrated, I uncarded the grounding rod, only to shout out in pain as the now black and copper rod zapped all of the electricity it had been storing into my hand. I screamed, my palm a blackened mess as I seized from the current, only to sag to the ground when it ran out. My breathing was ragged and seemed to stutter for a moment as Ema rushed to me.

“Carson! What happened!?” She shouted, lifting up my hand.

“I didn't think about something before I pushed it out of a card.” I replied after a few moments, groaning in pain. “Fuck that hurt.”

I could feel my healing amulet struggling to fix my arm and hand as I sat on the ground, slowly recovering. Ema fretted over me for a while as I did, eventually helping me stand and sit back down on a chair. After about thirty minutes my hand stopped hurting, completely healed. I

shook out the phantom tingles from it while I stood and walked over to the modified grounding rod. I picked it up, turning it over in my hands before carding it. I couldn't help but laugh.

The card still contained concepts of electrical and magical storage. However, everything electrical was now dwarfed by the concept of magic, which was only slightly weaker than it had been before I had zapped the fuck out of myself. As I kept examining it, I slowly realized what had happened. I had been modifying the capacitors to hold magic as well as an electrical charge, which they would discharge equally when not carded. But, when I added in the grounding rod the electrical dissipation from the rod had shifted the discharge from the modified capacitors from both magic and electricity, to mostly just electricity.

On a whim I pushed the card back into my hand and drove it into the ground before grabbing my lightning. I stood over the rod and leaned down, holding out the lightning gun and pulling the trigger, zapping the hell out of the rod for a full five seconds. I waited a bit before tapping it with my finger gingerly, though I was already pretty sure it wouldn't do anything. Sure enough nothing happened, so I immediately pulled it from the ground and carded it.

The magic concept was even bigger. Not by a massive degree, but certainly noticeable.

The rod still contained extra concepts, but they were dwarfed by the magic. I looked around for a second before walking over to the tarp covered stack of metal. I carded a sheet of aluminum and combined it with the magic rod. The magic concept of course carried over, while everything else faded even further into the background. I added two more sheets of aluminum to solidify it even further. I now had a sheet of metal that was lightweight, strong and had a pretty large magical concept. All of the other concepts faded into the background, far enough that they wouldn't interact with anything as long as I paid attention and did not stack on anything overwhelmingly electrical.

"Hell of a way to get here, but it worked!"

"It defused the electricity?"

"Yeah. It still has some leftover concepts but the magical concept is so strong it doesn't really matter."

"Carson, what would happen if you combined a rod with one of Thor's sparks?"

"I... I don't know." I said truthfully. "So far that glowing divine concept has disappeared after working its way into whatever object I put it in. It seems to heavily affect the objects though. Just look at how your bow changed, as well as the lightning gun. But it's something to keep in mind for the future."