

I woke up the next morning and spent some time relaxing and some more time training with my new armor. Ema suggested I tried juggling eggs to make sure I could control my incredibly increased strength, but that proved to be relatively easy with my increased speed and reflexes. Eventually, we simply spent some time sparring, and I bulldozed through another three trunks of robots. We now had a whole trunk full of caduceus droids, which Ema painted with a red cross and stored near her other rapid deployment trunks from when I was away from Earth. She grumbled and got replacement trunks printing out as well.

After a morning of training and fighting, I took a quick shower and got ready for another day of crafting, while Ema once again started working on the nurse stones. She was making steady progress that she was happy about, though there was still plenty of spreading to be done.

I wanted to work on the second half of the nurse stone project, the global shield system. While the stones would help the Earth's population treat, heal and even avoid major medical issues, I wanted something that could function as the last line of defense against exterior threats.

As I sat down and began planning out how I would design such a shielding system, I quickly remember that I had already created a shield of one type around the world, and the Sorceress Supreme might know a thing or two about covering the world in protection. Besides, I wanted to talk to her about her having the Time Stone.

I shot a message to Ema telling her where I was going before traveling down to New York while stealthed, taking to the air, and making my way to the New York Sanctum. I landed in an alleyway not too far from the building about five minutes later, only taking that long because I was still enjoying my new level of flight. After deactivating my stealth I made my way to the front door, knocking solidly.

It only took a few seconds for the familiar muscular form of the New York Sanctum Master to open the door.

"Greeting Maker, please come in," He said with a nod. "The Sorceress Supreme is expecting you."

I nodded and followed behind the man as he led me through the halls and into the connection point between sanctums, now with seven doorways all around the glowing globe of Earth. Standing under it, looking up at the globe was the Sorceress Supreme, turning to me with a smile as I entered. She looked a bit younger than she had the last time I saw her, but not by much. I could just make out the chain of my healing amulet around her neck.

"Maker, it is good to see you," She said, looking at my guide and nodding. "Thank you, Master Drumm, I will take it from here."

I watched the sorcerer leave before turning back to the Sorceress Supreme. Before I could say anything she raised her hand.

“Perhaps, before we start, we could find somewhere more private?” She suggested. “It’s empty now but this is the connection between sanctums, many cross through here.”

I nodded and let the mysterious woman lead me through to Kamar-Taj, past practicing apprentices and the masters teaching them, eventually stopping in a secluded tea room. She gestured to a seat before spending a few minutes making us both tea. She placed my cup and saucer in front of me, and I sipped it tentatively.

“Not bad,” I admitted. “Not usually a fan of tea but this is nice.”

“Fresh honey does do wonders for the taste,” She responded, sitting down across the table from me. “Now, I believe you have some questions?”

“Yeah, and a request for help,” I responded, the bald woman nodding in acceptance. “Where exactly did you get the Time Stone, and how long have you had it? I assume, since you know what it is, you know how dangerous it is, and how... weird reality gets around them?”

“It has been in the hands of the Masters of the Mystic Arts since the days of Agamotto,” She explained, parting a few layers of her monk robes to reveal a large amulet hanging from her neck. “He created the Eye of Agamotto around it as a way to seal its presence and still allow its energies to be utilized. We are very aware of how powerful and dangerous it can be.”

“Good. I would prefer it to be anywhere but here, but with the Space Stone on the *Void Skipper*, I really can’t throw stones. But that does bring up a point,” I started, taking a sip from the teacup before continuing. “I understand and agree that your order should stay out of the day-to-day of the world, but the stones paint a pretty big target on our back. Someone will eventually come looking for them. Maybe not today, or tomorrow, but it will happen eventually. The question is when they come looking will the Masters of the Mystic Arts step up to protect their home?”

The Ancient One listened to what I had to say, taking a sip of tea quietly before placing the cup back on her saucer. She studied my face for a long moment before nodding with a smile.

“The Masters of the Mystic Arts take the responsibility of the Time Stone seriously. If someone comes to Earth looking for it we will defend ourselves and Earth in general accordingly,” She explained confidently. “We will also stand with the other defenders of Earth should a sufficiently dangerous foe come from outside our borders. We live here Carson, we won’t let our home be destroyed.”

“No, I suppose you wouldn’t,” I said, sighing and leaning back. “Alright, I just needed to make sure you understood. I know it must feel like a puppy barking at Cerberus but...”

The ancient one laughed, shaking her head for a moment.

“An apt analogy, but not an accurate one. The difference in age does not mean my order nor myself is incapable of making mistakes, nor will your growing power remain lesser than mine for long.” She said admitted. “I understand the need to check.”

“It’s a little crazy. Less than six months ago I was just some guy,” I said, shaking my head, leaning on the table to rub my face. “Now I’ve got Infinity Stones to worry about.”

“Have you ever considered gathering them together?” She asked, taking a sip of her tea.

“Gathering the Stones?” I asked, an eyebrow raised as I studied the sorceress. “Of course I have. What kind of person doesn’t wonder what they would do with endless power? Luckily I have a gift, much more powerful than the cards.”

“Oh? And what would that be?”

“Perspective,” I said with a smile, thinking of the hundreds of stories from the Marvel comics that showed just how stupid that kind of power made you, and how much trouble it attracted “The concept of controlling the universe on that level is tempting, but in reality, it would never go well. I’m happy with my version of reality warping. It makes me nervous enough as is.”

“I suppose that is true. Power at that scale is never free, and the cost is often not what you expect, and considerably worse than you would hope.”

“I have a question for you... Is the time stone how you're doing your all-knowing shtick?” I asked, raising an eyebrow. “The card through the portal when I made my Stone detector, the anti-mind control spell...?”

She chuckled and nodded, her hand touching the amulet to tuck it back under her robes, hiding it from sight.

“It is, though it has its limitations,” She answered. “And its own costs. But, other times it is extremely useful. Such as right now.”

She stood from our table and walked to the counter where she had previously made our tea, opening the cabinet under it. From inside she pulled a large wooden crate, with rope handles and intricate carvings around the top and sides. She carried it over to me and placed it on the table, before stepping aside and gesturing to it. I stood and opened it slowly.

There, laid in some sort of fibrous packing material was a massive red cubic spinel, about seven or eight inches across. It was carved with various runes and symbols, each of them filled with gold metal, probably electrum. I reached in and lifted it out, turning it over in my hands.

“Is this... a piece from a Sanctum Spinel?”

“No, it is made from the same material in a similar style, with a similar enchantment,” She explained. “While its projection is not physical, it is still a projection of protection, capable of fending off invasions from extradimensional and mystical entities and energies. The best part is that it is capable of projecting its protection out around four hundred miles.”

“Which will compensate for my shield’s size problems!” I finished excitedly, gently putting the red crystal back. “This is exactly what I needed.”

“I know, that’s why I made it. A shield around the planet would give Earth an incredible amount of protection, and using this will enhance our extra-dimensional protection” She said with a smug smile, one that was well deserved as far as I was concerned.

We talked more about her gift, its limitation, and what to look out for when I was crafting with it, but I was eager to start with this new asset. So, after finishing the tea I traveled from Kamar-Taj to the warehouse to start experimenting. The first thing I did was get the crystal scanned and copied a few times, before carding the original so I could get a better grip on its concepts.

The Ancient One had been absolutely correct, I could easily use this as a way to extend the protection of a shield array massively, especially once I started stacking it and combining in divine essence, Uru, and whatever else would help.

Now all that was left, besides actually building the projectors, was to decide how to deploy it. I brainstormed for a while, coming up with a few possibilities when Ema came home for a break. She was steadily working the nurse stones across central Europe, having decided early on to roll them out by population density.

“So, any progress?” She asked, sitting down on a chair by my workstation.

“Yeah, the Ancient One was a big help,” I said, gesturing to the massive spinel sitting on the table.

“Holy hell, that is amazing,” Ema said, standing up to get a closer look. “She just gave it to you?”

“Yup, had it ready to go and everything. Now I just need to worry about deployment,” I explained, shaking my head. “The obvious choices are having it project up from Earth, or having it project from satellites. The problem is that they both have... well, problems.”

“Like what?” Ema asked, turning away from the spinel.

“Well... If I have the projectors on Earth, I’m not sure how high up I will be able to project. I would rather the shield be as far away from the Earth as possible, which would be easy with satellites,” I started to explain, pacing around slowly as I thought out loud. “The problem with the satellites is that they would have to cover more surface area, though admittedly it wouldn’t be that much extra comparatively. Also, planetside, I could bury them underground, in space, they will be a hazard to anyone flying by, including normal satellites.”

“... I feel like satellites are the superior option,” Ema said after a long moment. “How would you explain random projectors buried underground? You could just stealth the satellites and no one will know they are there.”

“Until a billion-dollar satellite crumples around one of them...” I pointed out. “There is just too much shit out there. Not to mention the fact that that amount is increasing...to be really safe we would have to go incredibly far away from the earth... or...”

“Onto something?” Ema asked, noticing my pause.

“Yeah, that we are being stupid,” I said. “I’m trying to puzzle this out when Tony already has satellites in space. He will know how this shit works. Better than me guessing.”

I sent a message to Tony, who messaged back that he was about to travel to the research facility and that I could meet him there. Ema decided to get back to work on the nurse stones, leaving me to fly across the moon by myself. It didn’t take long to find him, tapping away at the LPM.

“What are you changing?” I asked, resisting the urge to peek over his shoulder.

“Adding space to run wiring through the labs and other floors. Not much, just a half a foot off most of the ceilings,” He explained, taping the screen a final time before turning to look focus on me, though he was clearly distracted. “What’s up?”

“Well I have everything I need to finally set up a planetary shield,” I explained, Tony’s interest suddenly skyrocketing. “I’m pretty sure a satellite system is a way to go, but I know very little about how that works.”

“Holy shit, really? I thought you were stuck with shields being too small?”

“I recently got a few more things that pretty much cracked it wide open,” I explained.

“Let me guess, some Asgardian mambo jumbo?” He asked, rolling his eyes when I shrugged. “Well if it lets us put a shield around Earth I won’t complain. You’re going to need to talk to Shield or the WSC though.”

“Damn... was kind of hoping to do this without them.”

“It will be way easier now and for future satellite launches if you coordinate with them,” He explained, shaking his head. “I could put maybe another half dozen on top of the ones I already have up there, but it is kind of a clusterfuck if you don’t know what you’re doing.”

“Dammit... alright, I will design a satellite projector first, maybe test it on the moon first?”

“You're probably going to need to start with a satellite base first,” He explained. “Lots of tracking information is required to keep an orbit stable. I... well I could do it but the research station...”

“Dammit... yeah, one thing at a time,” I agreed, looking around. “Alright, I’ll bring it up to Shield when I have my defense fleet meeting.”

“Defense fleet? What the hell is that?”

I spent a few minutes talking to Tony about my idea, discussing the concept of a defense fleet stationed around the solar system. We even chatted about my potential solution for getting around the fact that my ships took forever to travel with a portal generator.

“You realize that is going to be a pretty big project,” Tony said with a surprisingly concerned face. “You're going to be pretty fucking swamped for the next few months between the research base, this fleet idea, and your planetary shield...”

“Yeah, I know. But it's worth it to finally get some proper defenses around Earth,” I said, shaking my head. “Alright, I need to make a phone call and poke the WSC into a meeting. That's going to be fun.”

“Yeah, good luck with that!” He said, lifting his arm up, which was where his travel bracer was. “Travel New York!”

The billionaire was whisked away a moment later leaving me alone in the LPM room. I double-checked the screen and saw his adjustment, which was mostly wiring space but also included a nightclub and casino combination on the entertainment floor. I shook my head but left it alone. It would be his to worry about.

I traveled back to the warehouse and pulled out my phone, dropping onto the couch in the lounge area and dialing in Nick Fury. It rang for a moment before he picked up.

“What do you want Carson?”

“Just needed to talk to you about the meeting with the WSC about the earth defense fleet,” I said, rolling my eyes at his brusqueness.

“...I'll let them know you called.” He said. “Anything else.”

“Yeah, tell them the opportunity to have any input is closing rapidly. I want to start getting to work on this. As well as a planetary shield,” I added. “I'm at the point where I should be able to make a planetary-level shield but I'm going to need some support with the logistics.”

As I talked, Ema came in through the landing pad, making her way to me, and sitting down on the couch across from me.

“...I'll let them know,” He said, sounding stressed and tired. “Anything else?”

“Nope, that's it. Thanks for being the messenger Director Fury. Feel free to pass me off directly to them, I'm sure you've got more important things to do.”

“I thought your phone worked by just entering in names?” He asked.

I opened my mouth to retort that I didn't know any WSC members... only to remember that I did, four in fact, though one might still be on Asgard.

“Damn. Sorry Fury, I'll call them directly next time.”

“Whatever. Goodbye.”

When the director hung up I let out a sigh.

“I think you are officially lower on his list than Tony by now,” Ema pointed out, with a laugh. “It's no wonder he is bald, the stress that man must endure dealing with all of you.”

“Yeah... Maybe I should do something nice for him, make him a gift of some sort...” I said, scratching my chin. “You done for the day?”

“Just for now, what about you?”

“I want to start going over the pieces of the Asgardian shield system,” I said. “Which is going to involve printing out a lot of materials. I probably won't get much further than that though.”

“Alright, I'll have Alfred start on some dinner.”

I nodded as she left, leaving me alone on the couch. I waited for a few minutes, taking a deep breath and letting it back out before I stood up. These projects weren't going to finish themselves.