

Not long after I made my offer we landed on the deck of the helicarrier, the large flight capable ship moored at a naval base near Washington DC. The ramp of the quinjet, which I was surprised to learn was the name of this particular aircraft design, opened up onto the flight deck. Both Fury and Natasha exited promptly, with me following behind them, my head on a swivel.

This was definitely a helicarrier version that took after aircraft carriers, as proven by the fact that we were floating on the water. The flight deck was lined with a handful of F-22 fighter jets as well as more quinjets, most of them being worked on in some capacity. I followed Fury as he entered through a hatch into the ship, taking one last look around before stepping in behind him.

“Natasha, lead Maker to lab twenty seven. His materials are being delivered there. I need to update the Security Council on the bombs disposal.” Fury said. “Please start with the Hydra tablets. After I’m done with the WSC I will escort the energy samples down to you.”

Natasha nodded and led me down a different corridor, Fury peeling off to go on his own. The redhead superspy guided me through several halls, down a flight of stairs and into a secure room, a rather thick door opening for us both, closing behind us as we stepped through. Inside were a few lab tables and everything I had requested, all stacked in different piles. I quickly started looking through everything, separating and organizing it.

“Are you going to stick around and watch?” I asked, looking at Natasha over my shoulder.

“Do you mind if I do?”

“Not at all. I would like the camera and microphones in here turned off though.” I answered before focusing back on my preparation.

Natasha nodded and made a short phone call, before telling me everything was off. I didn’t have my belt turned on, but oddly enough I trusted her. Even if I didn’t I felt sure knowing my power level had risen enough that I was relatively safe. Even if Hydra could make a bomb that would have probably cooked me inside of my armor no matter how good it was. It would have turned me to a cooked paste if it had gone off when I was standing next to it. Or maybe it would have just disintegrated me into a fine powdered ash. Would my armor have kept me alive long enough for me to realize what was happening? I needed to get my next armor upgrade ready. I need to find a way to speed that up, I almost died. What if I hadn’t been fast enough? What if whatever Hydra fucker who set that up had just lied about the timer? Had it been a trap for me specifically? Did they know I would come rushing if the shield called me? Should I skip town? If they know that much who knows what else they know. What if there one of those bombs near my house? I needed to move, needed to run needed to-

“Maker!” Natasha called out. I started, my strengthened grip bending the already finger dented metal table I had been leaning against.

“Fuck, sorry.” I said, pulling my hands off of the bent table. I shook my head and focused on the stacks of materials, starting to go through them.

Eventually, after getting everything organized I started putting together the Hydras tracking tablets. Natasha watched wordlessly over my shoulder as I put a dozen of them together over a span of half an hour with the resources Shield had gathered for me. When I was done I cracked I just looked down at the stack of tablets

“That's it?” She asked. “They are done?”

“Yeah.” I answered simply, having forgotten she was there.

“How does it work?” She asked, picking up one of the tablets and testing it out.

“Do you mean how does my ability function or what are its rules?” I asked. “Cause I have no idea how it actually functions, I just know it does.”

“Then that's what I meant.” She answered with a small smile, putting the tablet down. “It looked like you were just combining things together.”

“Well on the surface, yeah, that's what I was doing.” I explained, leaning back in my seat. “I pull objects into my cards and combine them together. That alone could be interesting by combining weird things to get strange effects or combine similar things to stack its effects. What really drives my ability is that once I start stacking things, concepts begin overlapping. The more I stack concepts the more powerful they get. The tablets for example.”

I took a tablet and scrolled through, focusing on one group of Hydra members.

“I combined a dozen different things all about location, finding things, maps, direction and a few others, working it all in to get something like these.”

“Is that how you track my mask?” She asked.

“No actually, that functions a very different principle, one that I came up with before I cracked the tracking tablet form.” I explained, pulling out her compass and showing it to her. “This just points in your direction.”

“You have a compass that always points to me.” She asked, raising an eyebrow and giving me a strong look.

“No no, your mask.” I explained, correcting myself with a shrug. “It's not like it lets me see you. Besides, I did warn you when you asked me to make one for you.”

Before she could comment on that, the door to the lab opened and Nick Fury stepped in, two agents behind him pushing in two large metal boxes, clamped shut and sitting on top of each other. He looked at Natasha and me before looking at the stack of tablets, nodding and motioning the two agents to bring the two boxes in closer. They silently lifted the boxes up onto the counters before leaving without a word. When the door sealed shut Fury turned back to me.

“What I’m about to tell you is classified information. It cannot leave this room.” He said, looking first at me, and then surprisingly at Natasha, who nodded.

“Fine. But what I told you before still stands Fury. I’m not drinking the kool aid.”

For a long moment he stared at me, before finally nodding.

“Understood. During World War II Hydra discovered an object of unknown origin known as the Tesseract. A glowing blue cube less than five inches across.”

My heart skipped a beat as Fury described what was sounding very much like the Cosmic Cube. If that catastrophe was floating around on this planet things just got a whole lot more complicated.

“The Red Skull and his Hydra scientists devised a way to siphon energy from it, storing it and using it to power weapons of war.” He gestured to the metal boxes and I started opening one. “These weapons were incredibly powerful and the energy source incredibly potent. Shield has done its best to confiscate every surviving piece of Hydra technology we could find.”

I undid the latches and lifted the box’s lid, revealing four brick sized metal cells, each one with a clear window showing a glowing blue energy. They were resting inside a nest of padding, some sort of organic feeling fiber. Leaving that box open I started on the second box, revealing eight similar energy cells, these ones smaller but nestled in the same material.

Hesitantly I reached down and carded one of the small cells, pulling back when it easily slid into the Deck. I summoned the card and examined it, eyes going wide back in surprise.

There were undertones of energy storage, ammunition and a few other things. They even had a small Hydra concept. But dwarfing that by all comparisons was a single concept, one so pure that it was honestly shocking. It was some sort of energy. Cosmic energy maybe, or some sort of creation energy, flavored by something that I couldn’t quite put my finger on. It still stunned me for a full thirty seconds. This was absolutely what had made that bomb so powerful. Anything denoting with this kind of energy would have vaporised anything in its path, the bomb would have leveled half of the city. I would have-

“Maker?” Fury said, pulling me back. “Everything alright?”

“Yeah... yeah... just surprised by what the concepts are.”

“Concepts?”

“I’ll explain after, continue.”

“... Shield has been attempting to recreate the energy weapons, though it has recently been pushed into overdrive after the events in New Mexico.”

“The sudden realization that we aren’t alone makes everyone wish they had a bigger gun.” I commented, shaking my head.

“Exactly. This research has been going on for years however, and included the explosives produced by Hydra, including the ones that Steve Rogers sacrificed himself to stop from reaching the US.” He explained, the next part coming out painfully. “After the rediscovery of Hydra, we performed a thorough investigation into what projects certain members were pushing for. It seems that the core proponents of the research into replicating and refining these weapons were Hydra. The bombs were one of them. They utilized repurposed energy cells to create an explosion. Not quite as powerful as a nuke of the same size but alarmingly close.”

“So Hydra used its influence in Shield to convince it to develop weapons of mass destruction.” I asked, getting a confirming nod from Fury. “How did they manage to make one while you still don’t know how to?”

“We believe that they were purposely sabotaging our research to make it appear like no progress was being made in the final steps, while their scientist had successfully completed a prototype.” Fury explained. “This is just speculation at this point though, we had no idea it even existed.”

“Right... I’m going to make that tracking tablet now.” I said.

I turned and got to work, explaining how and what I was doing, mostly for Fury’s sake. I ended up having to do this a bit differently, working out that the cosmic energy concept was too powerful to just meld easily into the tracking tablet. Luckily I had a few magic rods in the Deck to help smooth everything out. I ended up only needing one small power cell, with most of my work attempting to compete with its massive conceptual weight.

When I was finally done I had used twice as many resources as I had originally predicted, but had a tablet that was tracking this particular flavor of cosmic energy. I pulled it out of the deck when I was done and looked at it. At a glance there were two gathering points for the energy sources, one here on the helicarrier and another off of the screen. I attempted to pan around to see but Fury grabbed the tablet and attempted to pull it from my hands. Despite the fact that he had no chance in a tug of war with me I carded it away.

"If that works correctly then there are secure locations other than this ship where we store these energy sources." Fury explained, looking agitated. "That is a secret that cannot get out, even to an ally like you."

"Fine, I understand." I said. "I don't need to know every Shield secret. But I do want something for this, and for those."

I said, gesturing to the stack of twelve Hydra tracking tablets, before pointing to the box of four energy cells.

"I want those."

"What? Absolutely not!" Fury said harshly. "Ignoring the fact that I just witnessed you make something to track that energy source from one of them, I can't let you leave with those samples, especially not now that I know how your ability works."

"All you have to do is say they were used in the creation of the tracking tablet." I said with a shrug. "Look, you have your lie detection band on, correct? I promise not to use them to track down your secret facility. I have no interest in anything nefarious. The only reason I am so determined to build my arsenal up is so that I can defend myself and occasionally protect people."

"Sir... he did fly towards a bomb. To save people." Natasha pointed out, getting a look from an annoyed Fury, who then continued to stare at me. "And he isn't lying."

"...Lie to me." Fury said after a full half minute of staring at me. "Prove the band's work on you."

"The sky is purple, I hate pizza, Natasha would look better as a blonde."

Natasha rolled her eyes behind Fury, but I could see a small smile on her lips, a real one. After a minute of internal debating Fury finally answered.

"You can have two." He said, crossing his arms.

"Four and when I crack the personal durability problem I will upgrade your squad for free."

"... fine." He said, watching as I went to the box and carded the four large energy cells. "The tablet?"

I pushed out the tablet and handed it to him, watching as he quickly scanned through it.

“There are a few small sources around Europe. Those just might be leftovers from the war. There is another larger source, at one of the gathering places... The Sokovian base.” Fury said before turning and leaving the room. “Natasha, please escort Maker to the flight deck. Then meet me at the helm.”

We both watched him leave, before Natasha gave me a look, turning to leave as well. I reached out and gave her arm a poke causing her to pause and turn, look confused and questioning.

“What was that?”

“I wanted to get you to stop without grabbing you. Seemed like a bad idea to grab the super spy.”

“It can be, when I’m distracted or under a lot of stress. I tend to keep it under control though.” She explained, leaning back up against the counter.

“Stress like surviving a bomb that would have probably wiped out an entire city?” I said, getting a reluctant nod in agreement.

“Fair. What is it?”

“I just wanted to make sure you’re okay.”

“If I’m okay?” She asked, looking at me skeptically. “Maker, I’m used to that kind of situation. This isn’t even the first time I’ve stood next to a counting down WMD. The real question is are *you* okay?”

“Of course.” I responded, probably a bit too fast.

“Well, I’ll survive. Might be a while before I can sleep again but I’ll be okay.” She said after a moment, wearing her patented, and most assuredly fake, teasing smile. “But thank you for your concern.”

I nodded and Natasha led me out of the lab and back out through the Helicarrier. Within a few minutes I was taking off from the flight deck, flying towards the city. I quickly found a quiet corner to pull in my wings and travel back to the quarry. When I got there Ema was still gone, which reminded me to text her so she would know I could pick her up. After that, rather than return to my other project I sat down in my chair and pulled out one of the four cosmic energy cells, turning it over in my hand. It was warm to the touch and felt heavier than I would have expected.

After a few minutes of just looking at it I put it down on the table and got my universal scanner, giving the energy cell a scan. I carded the cell again before dropping back into my seat to read the results.

The first thing I focused on was where the energy had come from. I paged through its stats before finding a small snippet that confirmed that the energy contained inside the cell was energy coinciding with the creation of the universe, drained from the Tesseract by Hydra. It also said that the Tesseract was a vessel, a storage container for a powerful object. I let out a breath of relief. While it wasn't complete confirmation, the fact that my scanner didn't say it was a Cosmic Cube was reassuring. I just hope that it stayed gone, wherever it ended up. I spent a bit longer going over the scan results in detail, all the while holding the card between my fingers.

It was incredibly powerful and the... feel of the energy was nebulous and strange. In a few ways it was like the golden concept that was in Thor's sparks, as if it was difficult to describe in words what it really was. It did however bear a strong resemblance to creation, or maybe some sort of fundamental building block?

As I was sitting in my chair toying with the card I happened to look across the workshop space and see the Destroyer armor duplicate. At almost half way through its repair time, the repair tablet had made serious progress. The head, arms and chest were done, all the way down to the start of the stomach. It still had a few days to go though.

I slowly stood from my chair and walked over to the table it was resting on, before disconnecting the repair tablet. The tablet that was creating something out of seemingly nothing. I combined one of the energy cells with the tablet and pushed it back out, reconnecting it to the armor. After double checking that everything that I wanted deselected was, I started it back up.

Where the previous timer had quoted four more days before completion, it now said thirty two hours. Thirty percent of what it had been previously.

"Well I'll be damned."

Before I could do anything else I got a message from Ema that she needed a pick up. Without another thought I traveled to her.

"Hey. Any trouble?" I asked, appearing in front of her.

My companion said nothing, instead only stepping closer. She looked into my eyes for a moment, and I could see the hurt and worry she felt, despite her eyes being pure emeralds. For a moment I thought she was going to slap me. Instead, before I could react, she reached out and wrapped her arms around me and held me, pulling me against her until my head rested on her shoulder.

And just like that my control slipped.

My knees went weak, almost falling out from under me. Ema held me up as I grabbed at her, my own shaking. Tears fell and I sobbed hard, almost convulsing as the last few hours rolled over me like a heavy wave.

“You're okay.” She said softly. “You're okay.”

“There were seconds Ema.” I said, still gripping her tightly. “S-seconds!”

“But you're alive.” She said, rubbing the back of my head. “You're alive, and you saved everyone. You're okay.”

I couldn't respond, my throat tightening and my heart racing. My thoughts ran and bounced, erratic and panicked as I shivered and sobed. I had almost died.

It was a while before I could speak the words to travel home clearly enough for them to work.