

The first thing I did when I returned was head to the controls I had for the nurse stone network. Ema had been working on getting everything spread out almost none stop, save a few dates with Jarvis and a couple of hours painting. She had spread the stones to cover every major population center in the world, including Wakandan cities, and had been working her way down to lower and lower concentrations. At this point, she was filling in mostly empty space around the planet.

The controls were stashed in a secret location, which I traveled to after dropping off Ema. I planned on using this space as my control point for large-scale projects. Originally I had just planned on sacrificing a few spaces of my deck to hold certain important things, or maybe working everything together into one large control panel. But after some thought, I decided that it was better to keep it somewhere Ema could travel to if necessary, in case I died and the Deck vanished with everything inside.

The room was simple, a five-hundred square foot room encased in fifty feet of ultra metal, conceptually enhanced faraday cages, and a half dozen other materials specifically mixed to block everything, to keep something hidden and unobservable. It was perfectly sealed and blocked everything from sound to magic according to my universal scanner. After the first five minutes of working inside it, I had to add a white noise maker after I realized the absolute utter silence was getting on my nerves.

It was also fifteen miles deep into a random spot on the moon.

There were already a few things set up inside this space. Against the far wall were two classic big red buttons, with the standard translucent plastic coverings down over them. Under each of them were two radial selectors, one with the options for "Destroy," "Disable," and "Shut down," and the other with the options "all," "on Earth," and "deployed." This was my emergency control system for all of my battle bots and caduceus droids. With these buttons, I could destroy all of the battle bots easily and safely, without having to take away the healing of the caduceus droids as well. I didn't think they would ever go bad on their own or anything like that, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

In a different corner was the already-made control panel for the nurse stones. It showed a slowly spinning wireframe of the Earth with dots and circles all around it. Ema was apparently almost completely done covering populated areas and was already thirty-seven percent done with the entire planet. Considering the scope of the project, that was incredibly impressive. I tapped the control system awake before finding the controls for the potency level. It was technically on its lowest setting, but that wasn't really a metric that would translate well into just how effective it was. I chewed my lip for a moment before increasing it slightly, the gauge going up five marks out of fifty. This was an increase of ten percent above the baseline.

This was significantly ahead of schedule, as I had originally intended to increase it by a single mark a year, in an attempt to hide the almost universal health improvement the nurse stones provided behind "improved living conditions" or something like that. But it felt wrong to

hold back so much. I knew that I was dabbling in what a lot of people would call playing god, and quite a few people would vilify me for holding back like this, and probably rightly so. But I still believed that uplifting the world with my creations would only result in problems later on. History was full of examples of what happened when you fucked with society on a massive scale like that, and it was hardly ever good. Not to mention what could happen if humanity gave up and began to rely exclusively on my creations

That didn't make the nightmares or guilt any easier to deal with.

I took a deep breath and resisted the urge to turn the nurse stones any higher before traveling away, back to the warehouse. I hated the fact that I couldn't do more, especially because the scenarios I was worried about ranged from unlikely to improbable, but the consequences were so severe that I couldn't risk it.

What if one day I woke up in a different world, and everything I made here came with me or fell apart? The entity that brought me here could just as easily decide my next adventure started now, and I was going to some new reality. What if I died and my powers stopped working? I was effectively ageless with my amulet, but I could definitely see situations, maybe in a couple of dozen centuries, that I voluntarily removed it to age normally. That didn't even take into account if I was killed, which is getting less likely every day, but would never be impossible in a marvel reality, even one as basic as this one.

What if I discovered my objects were negatively affecting people or were bad for the fabric of reality? What if the entity was something nefarious, and was hoping I would turn myself into a cornerstone of humanity so that they could yank me away and destabilize the entire foundation?

All of them were unlikely. But all of them would devastate humanity if they became dependent on me. I was depriving Earth of a utopia without sickness, starvation, or even old age because I was worried it would stunt humanity's growth, destabilize an already unwieldy balance, and on the chance that this was all temporary.

I let out another long breath, shaking my head and looking around the warehouse, my eyes trailing over Ema's beautiful murals that covered all four walls. After a long moment of silence, I made my way over to my workshop area.

I had a lot of work to do.

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The rest of the week, along with the following one was spent finishing everything I needed for the Earth Defense Force. I had put together a truly ludicrous amount of equipment, systems, and everything in between. Divine essence and Uru were spent freely, and by the time I was done feeding the blueprints to the new shipyard berths, I knew that each of the ships

would be incredibly overpowered, dwarfing the capabilities of the *Void Skipper* by leaps and bounds

Despite that, with the improvements I had made to the LPMs around the shipyards, a Defender Class would only take a week and a half to build, while the Command Class would take just under two and a half. It would still be months before the fleet was finished, but it was happening quicker than I imagined.

I made a call to Councilwoman Hartford, letting her know that the ships were being built, and that they would be finished in a few weeks. She was clearly caught off guard, first by the fact that I had called her, although judging from the background noise I had managed to reach her home phone, and next by the production timeline. She promised to notify the other members of the council. Before saying goodbye I asked about something that had been bothering me.

“So...Councilmen Rockwell... what was that about?”

The older woman let out a sigh before going silent, probably gathering her thoughts before she finally responded.

“Rockwell is a steadfast and honorable member of the WSC,” She explained, trying to stay diplomatic. “But he did not react well to the purging of Hydra. Several members of the organization gleefully and truthfully admitted that they used his predictable responses to certain... buzzwords, for lack of a better term, as a fulcrum to push several of their projects through.”

“Damn...”

“Indeed. One of the more... terrifying concepts was something called ‘Project: Insight, which has since been scrapped.’” She continued. “On the surface, it was a proposal to construct three additional helicarriers. They would be top of the line, equipped with the most sophisticated weapon systems we could design, that would allow them to precisely strike targets from the air. They would have given Shield complete military superiority on any battleground, be it sea, air, or land.”

“And Hydra wanted them.”

“Of course, but it gets worse,” She assured me. “Project: Insight was barely getting the majority vote it need to get approval, mostly on the back of Rockwell's insistence. Hydra infiltrators barely had to raise a finger. As we were interrogating Hydra assets we discovered Project: Insight's true purpose, a weapons platform that they would use to eliminate dissidence, even before it arose, using an advanced psychological profiling algorithm. They were going to reveal themselves to the sound of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilian deaths all over the planet.”

“Fucking hell,” I mumbled while rubbing my face.

“Precisely.”

“And he saw me creating the shield and the defense force as some crazy person putting weapons in spaces to rain down on the helpless civilians.”

“That is what I surmised,” She answered. “I do not know for sure, but that's my guess.”

“A pretty solid guess, I would say,” I responded, letting out a short groan. “Well, there isn't anything I can do about it. I'll try not to antagonize him but this project is more important than one man's regret or guilt. I appreciate you having my back, by the way.”

“Your welcome,” She said easily before a slight noise from her end caught her attention. “Now if you'll excuse me, I would like to get back to my day off. I only get to see my granddaughter once or twice a month.”

“Of course, sorry to bother you while you're with family.”

“It's alright, I wouldn't have picked up if I didn't want to.”

A short goodbye later and I hung up, letting out a long groan. There was really no way for me to have known that Rockwell was going to be an issue, but I still felt like it could have been avoided. After a moment of grumbling though I shook my head. I could mope and complain later. I way to much to get done.

With the fleet under production, it was finally time to start working on the shield system, another massive project. Shield was still working on the satellite that would serve as the main foundation of the planetary shield network, but I could still get the shield projector itself, as well as the propulsion system ready for the final step.

In reality, this was probably going to be the easiest part of the entire process. I had already spent plenty of time examining the Asgardian shield system, the shield system I used was already maxed stacked and ready to go, and sorcerous spinel was just a singular part so there wasn't much to worry about there. All that was left to do besides the actual combining and conceptual crafting was to go through and familiarize myself with the Wakandan tech.

Technically the shield projector I had been using up until this point was derived from a Wakandan-made shield already, but I had conceptually crafted it so much at this point that I was hoping it would be considered something new, at least conceptually.

In total, I spent another four days working through the design and combination process for the shield system. Most of that was spent waiting for things to finish printing out, so I managed to work my way through the list of odds and ends that Tony and Pepper needed me to

finish. I delivered the good news to Tony, who was excited to get everything in place and ready. By the end of the week, the research base would be ready for its opening day, whenever we decided that would be.

When everything was done printing, I spent the rest of the time experimenting with activation methods, trading specifically designed programs and parts with Tony, copying spells from the sorcerers at Kamar-Taj, and working through the parts of Wakanda's shield projector tech. When I was finally satisfied I had everything I needed I got to work I started combining all of my resources together into the final product.

Dozens of parts, pulled from the Asgardian and Wakandan systems were mixed together, stacked with all sorts of energy producers and efficiency upgrades. I included several sorcery spell matrixes that absorbed different types of energy, like kinetic and thermal, and diverted or converted it. A simple alteration with a few concepts meant that the shield would actually absorb and strengthen to a degree when it was hit with various energy types. It had its limitations of course but even minor absorption abilities would massively increase the shield's effectiveness.

I also combined the core from the Asgardian system, the cube spinel from the Ancient One contribution, and the center spike of the Wakandan projector, which ended up being some sort of strange vibranium-infused artificial crystal. I couldn't make heads or tails of its description from my universal scanner, but it worked perfectly with the other parts.

With the core done, I put together an energy source and stabilizing unit, the makeup of which would be built around a handmade case built specifically built for the now-finalized core. I used various parts from both the Asgardian and Wakandan shield projectors, adding in a dozen maxed stacked and divine-enhanced arc reactors, hundreds of energy cells, as well as a regenerating concept that I worked out with solar panel cells a the sunstone from Asgard.

The result was a three-foot thick and eight-foot wide octagonal device that I could physically insert the core into, and that would pour energy into it to protect the shield. Combining them together with the Deck, since the energy source and stabilizer were already built to hold it, was a singular construct with the core in place permanently, similar to how combining a car with a car part would combine together seamlessly.

The final product was a shield projector that dwarfed anything I had made before, including the newly made divine-enhanced system I had used for the fleet. Its protective strength was incredible, and it walked the line of S class into a named creation. I was pretty sure when the entire project was done that would change.

On top of nearly perfecting the shield system, I also put together the "propulsion" system for the satellite. This was where Tony's contribution was the strongest, his programs and a specifically made repulsor system, combined together with my artificial gravity system, a few

choice spells, and a dozen other contributions resulted in the closest thing to an immovable object I had made so far.

The system, when inactive would float itself around the Earth, staying at a specific altitude and direction that it would be getting from the control portion of Shield's satellite, whenever they got around to finishing it. When activated, however, it would lock itself into position above the Earth, unable to move in any direction. This could, hypothetically, be overpowered with enough kinetic energy, but with how much I was leaning the concept into each projector working together with other the other satellites, they would be able to spread the load through the whole system.

In truth, everything I had built so far was over-engineered and overpowered to a frankly ludicrous degree, which is just what I was aiming for. At this point, I had finished everything I could, which meant I was just waiting for the WSC contribution, which they claimed would be ready by the end of the following week. On one hand, I was not used to having to wait so long for something I would be able to card, but on the other, I was incredibly thankful to finally have some time to unwind.

On my first day off from the mad rush of crafting I had been putting myself through I called Natasha. She was happy to hear from me, though we had chatted plenty during the near month I had been working. She had just gotten back to the Triskelion from some sort of mission. About ten minutes into our conversation I brought up our second date.

"Any opinions about bowling?" I asked curiously as I walked around one of the shipyard berths, watching one of the three Defender Class ships come together.

"I'm okay at it, and I'm sure it would be fun," She said, her smile audible through the phone. "Will you be adding on something less normal at the end, like last time?"

"Sure, I could come up with something," I assured her with a chuckle. "Anything come to mind?"

"Not, in particular, surprise me."

We chatted for a while longer, much longer than I had intended to stay on the phone with her. Eventually, it was getting a bit late, and I knew she would have to work the next day. We said a quick goodbye, and I promised to call her again soon.

I made my way back into the warehouse to find Ema putting some of the crates she used to carry the nurse stones back under the UCMs. The caduceus bots she was using as drones were already in rest mode, standing straight in the far corner. When she noticed me she stood and waved.

"Done for the day?" She asked, noticing I wasn't rushing around.

“Done for a while,” I answered back. “Ships are under construction and I’m waiting for the satellite component for the shield network. Tony mentioned needing to talk to me when I had some free time so I’ll probably go see him tomorrow, but for now, I’m all set with large projects.”

“That's good, some time away from crafting will do you good.”

I nodded in agreement, dropping down onto the lounge couch with a groan. I was napping before Ema could join me.