

Chapter 31 - Shocking

When I got back home I immediately started working on Ema's bow to distract myself from the now too quiet apartment. I got the old bow from my room and laid it out alongside the two new ones. I compared the two new ones and the old one before deciding I wouldn't add the old one into the new version as it contained a few negative concepts like old, used and worn. I put it away and started going through the extra parts that I bought. As I suspected when I bought them, they all had concepts of being bow parts, so I wouldn't wind up with any weird extras if I combined them.

The bows alone were C ranked, and I could feel them getting more conceptually powerful as I layered on the extra parts. When I was finally done and I combined the two bows together the result was a basic B rank. I stood and pulled back the bowstring, noting that it was a bit more difficult, but not massively. Even so, conceptually it was a much more powerful and accurate bow. I grabbed a few normal sporting arrows from a pile and stood.

"Travel Upstate."

This time I was ready for the momentum and managed to stay steady as I was now standing on the familiar forested hill. I nocked an arrow and pulled it back, aiming straight at a nearby tree, still lit up by the slowly setting sun. I released after a moment of focus, already missing how easy to use the archery ring had made using a bow. The arrow slammed into the tree with a thunk that reverberated through the forest. I stared at it with wide eyes before making my way over to it. Sure enough the arrow, which had a blunted tip for target shooting, was buried at least eight inches into the wood, completely stuck in the tree.

Quickly I popped back to the apartment, put the new bow on the coffee table and snagged the old one, before traveling back to the forest. I stood at the same spot and fired another arrow, managing to hit the tree a second time. This time however the barely went in more than a few inches. Satisfied with what I had created I traveled home, tucking the old bow into my closet as a backup before sitting back down in the living room. I carded the new bow and examined it, going over the concepts while scratching my cheek.

The bow was powerful and would definitely be an upgrade to the original's range and effectiveness, which would in turn make Ema even more effective. Even so, it lacked impact, especially considering the plans floating around my head for my replacement weapons. I could add the rest of Thor's sparks, that would probably make a drastic change to the weapon, if what happened to the stun gun was any indication. The problem was that Ema was made of metal. Having her around during Thor's fight with the destroyer had been dangerous enough, but making her main weapon shoot electricity or lightning was a recipe for disaster.... assuming electricity actually hurt her.

I pulled out my cell phone and sent her a text message, asking if she knew how vulnerable she was to electricity. Her reply came back instantly.

“It would hurt.” She wrote. “I’m not really electronic so I’m probably more resistant than technology but too much would still toast me.”

I sent an “alright” back to her, pondering my next step. Now I had a problem that needed solving, even if I didn’t combine the sparks with the bow, her being sensitive to electricity was unacceptable. I needed to fix that as soon as possible. I leaned over and grabbed my laptop and for the next twenty minutes compiled a list of things I would need to make Ema her upgrade. I would construct another portion of transformation material using the two spooks of nitinol I had left and oobleck, combining it with every compatible electrically insulating material I could get my hands on. Then I would top it off with a remote control device so the control concept staid as powerful as it was.

My plan figured out I messaged Ema that she should stop somewhere along the way between Chicago and Texas, somewhere far away from people so we could apply her upgrade and so I could make her bow and she could try it out. When she replied with an affirmative I smiled. I was done for the day, which meant pizza... or maybe chinese?

----- *The Next Morning* -----

I woke up the next morning feeling refreshed. I had gone to sleep extra early and had fallen asleep almost immediately. I sent a message to Ema thanking her, explaining that I genuinely hadn’t realized how tired I had been.

“I know, I could tell. But you’re welcome.” She replied immediately, before continuing. “I’m about two hours out of Chicago. Should the landing pad be in the city?”

“As close as you can get, maybe in a large park?” I sent back. This time it took her about a minute to respond.

“Okay, I think I found a good one.” She eventually responded. “What are you doing today?”

“Just some light shopping.” I explained. “I’m relaxing plenty, don’t worry.”

“Okay, take it easy.”

After my affirmation I went through my morning routine and left the apartment not long after. I rode my bike through the city before stopping at a random cafe, enjoying a bagel and lox and a cup of coffee while I planned where I would be going shopping. Ema messaged me before I could reach my first store, explaining she had placed the first landing pad and was already on her way to Texas.

I spent the majority of the day riding around the city shopping and relaxing. I bought a half dozen books on expert level driving as well as another eight books on marksmanship and one and a few on general firearms knowledge. I also bought the original Star Wars trilogy to watch, which I just happened to see when I was checking out. I was curious to see if there was any differences between the version I remembered and the one from this reality.

After I was done at the bookstore I visited a few hardware stores and a specialty store that had one of the insulators I needed. I already missed having my truck as I struggled to carry the heavy bags into an alleyway to card. After I was done I perused a few pawnshops, buying four class rings from random schools across the city as well as a few other random pieces of jewelry to have around. I was at the point that I could barely tell when I pulled my movement and martial arts ring off anymore, which meant it was time for a new learning ring to take its place. I also bought a ring holding jewelry box from the last pawnshop I visited.

My last stop was the hobby shop where I picked up a half pound of clay, a few panes of colored glass and two radio controllers. After that I headed home, stopping by a Mexican shop for a burrito lunch.

When I finally got back I put the first Star Wars on the tv before heading to the kitchen, listening to the opening orchestral while making another batch of oobleck. When it was done I carded all of it into a single card, before making a second one and combining them together. I combined the two spools of nitinol with the last three sheets of titanium and the last two sheets of aluminum, then combined it all together. I flicked that card into the deck before grabbing a few plates and bringing them to the living room.

When I was comfortable I poured all two dozen colors of resin insulating powder onto a plate and carded the entire pile. The powder was meant to be cooked into an electrically insulating layer on metal, and while it had a small transformative concept, it also had strong melting and reacting with heat concepts as well. If I combined all the colors together as cards the insulating and transformative concepts would rise but so would the ones I didn't want. Thankfully the insulating concept was large enough on its own to still be useful.

When everything was set I mashed all of the insulating materials together. With every combination the base card's insulation concept got larger and larger, and while it was full of smaller concepts the fact that I was using such a variety meant that they quickly fell far enough behind that they weren't active. The biggest concern was the fragile concept carried by the colored panes of glass, but that would be overridden massively by one of the sheets of titanium. Finally, when the insulating amalgamation was done I combined it with the controller and combined that to the transformative metallic blob. The result was something that shouldn't mix up the exosuits used concepts while still adding a huge resistance to electrical current. It should also add a not insignificant amount of material to the suit, giving Ema more material to work with.

After that I took all of the extra leftover solid or powder ingredients and combined them together into a simple gold ring. The result was a ring that should protect me from electricity, though the remaining glass I put into it meant it was a bit on the fragile side. I combined it with a second ring to mitigate that slightly, but it was still a bigger concept than I would have liked.

When I was done with Ema's upgrade and my personal protection I combined all books on marksmanship and gun knowledge before adding it to a class ring. I switched it with my martial arts and movement ring, sliding it into the ring case I had just bought. The case had a few normal rings that I had bought earlier, but I kept them separate. When I slid in on the ring I couldn't help but gasp with the new rush of knowledge. It took me a minute to parse everything out but I couldn't help but smirk when I was done. It had been miles better than the overload that had happened with my movement ring.

I stood and went to the safe, the door already opened. I grabbed one of the pump action shotguns and studied it. I knew it was a Mossberg 500, and was worth about two hundred dollars in its current state. I knew it shot 12 gauge rounds and held six shots, five in the magazine and one in the chamber. If I had the proper tools I could have disassembled it, cleaned it and reassembled it without breaking a sweat. I smirked as I almost instinctively checked if it was loaded... only to find that it was. I cursed and spent the next ten minutes unloading every gun in the safe and storing the rounds in a box, which I slid under the safe. The gun I had brought with me to New Mexico, which I now knew was a 1911A chambered in .45 ACP, stayed loaded and on my nightstand.

A few minutes after I finished unloading the guns I got a message from Ema, telling me to come to her, that the landing pad was on the back of the truck. I gathered up a few things and quickly put on all my deployable armor before traveling to her. I emerged, standing in the bed of the truck, looking out into a huge forest, no road in sight. I looked around and found Ema sitting on a fallen tree about thirty feet away, so I hopped out of the truck and made my way to her.

"How's it going?" I asked as I sat down on the log next to her.

"Good, the drive has been peaceful." She said, pulling off her hat and scarf. "So what is this upgrade you made me?"

"It's something to add to your exosuit, it should make it pretty hard to hurt you with electricity." I explained. "You gotta get out of the suit for me to apply it though."

She nodded and continued pulling off her disguise before starting to shift, the suit slowly reforming into its cube form. When she was free she flew over my shoulder.

"Do a lap above the trees, stretch your... fly around and make sure no one else is nearby." I said as I leaned down to card the exosuit, quickly combining it with the upgrade.

When Ema returned a few minutes later I pushed the suit back out.

“Everything clear?” I asked as she hovered around the cube, scanning it.

“Yes, there is no one around for at least several miles.” She responded. “The nearest home is six miles away, on the other side of a large hill.”

I nodded as she slid into place and started reforming the now slightly darker suit.

“Oh! Um....” She said, trailing off as she finished forming. “That's new...”

I was about to ask what was wrong when her skin started to shift colors. It was a rainbow of different shades and mixes, before eventually settling on her original burnished metal.

“What was.... The insulating powder!” I said, shaking my head. “Of all the concepts to interact it was the control and the color?”

“It seems so... it is very interesting... I will experiment as I continue on my trip.” Ema responded before looking up at me. “For now, you said we had a weapon to test?”

“Yeah, here.” I pushed out the new bow and handed it to her, before handing her the archery ring as well.

“It doesn't look too impressive.”

“It's not done yet.” I explained. “That's just a maximized bow. Here.”

I handed her a few arrows, which she stuck in her thigh, a tentacle of metal holding them for her. She nocked, drew and fired an arrow in one smooth motion, the arrow slamming into a tree about fifty feet away.

“Oh, yeah I can feel the difference. Much more power.” She said with a nod. “This is a solid upgrade.”

Ema took a half dozen other shots, aiming at trees that were further and further away. After each shot she nodded, before finally slamming the last arrow I had given her into the last arrow she shot, both of them stuck in a tree at least two hundred feet away. I couldn't help but smirk as she turned back to me.

“You said it wasn't done? .” Ema asked when she was done, passing the bow back to me. “What's next?”

“What's next is the absolutely horrible part.” I said, starting to walk back to the truck. “We are going to disassemble it, infuse each piece with a single card of magic electricity from the stun gun and then reassemble it. Then we are going to add a couple of Thor's sparks to it.”

“What? No!” Ema said harshly, stretching her arm out to grab my shoulder. “You'll be hurting yourself every time, that's unacceptable”

“Mhmm, it's going to suck real bad.” I said with a nod. “But my undersuit gives me protection, plus I made this ring with the leftover stuff from your upgrade. Should make this a lot easier than it would have been.”

“...I still don't like it.” Ema said after a pause, shaking her head. “Letting you hurt yourself to make me a weapon. It feels wrong.”

“Ema, it won't be permanent and it's going to be a lot less damage than it was when I first made it.” I assured her. “Besides, the more powerful you are the better you can protect me later.”

She shook her head again but kept walking, laying the bow on the tailgate of the truck and shifting her hand into a screwdriver, starting to take it apart. As she worked I climbed up and sat on the tailgate next to her, pushing out the stun gun and getting to work. And boy had I been right, it did suck. It wasn't nearly as bad as it could have been, it hurt slightly less than the single spark version of the stun gun had and left no real damage, but it still hurt. And I very much underestimated how many parts the bow had. Nevertheless we got through it in half an hour, the bow getting put back together in a few minutes.

“Alright, time to see if it was worth it.” I said, picking it up and carding it, a chuckle escaping as I examined it. “Well it's still a B ranked card, but boy did that change it. It's suffused with magic and electricity. They aren't massive concepts but they are definitely there.”

I pushed out the bow and handed it to Ema, passing her a few more arrows. She silently nocked an arrow and fired it in the same smooth motion. The arrow streaked across the gap with a blue afterglow, slamming into a tree and crackling with electricity for a split second before going silent, smoke slowly curling up from the arrow.

“Damn... Not bad.” I said, holding my hand out. “Now let's do better.”

She handed me the bow back and I carded it, combining it with two of the sparks. Ema tried to stop me from adding the second one but I couldn't help myself, I wanted her weapon to be the best I could make. I smirked as I could feel a massive change in the bow, so I pushed it out into my hands.

“Holy...”

The bow, which had previously looked just like a normal compound bow, was now completely different. All of the weight saving cutouts in the frame were gone, replaced by a solid metallic frame that weighed exactly the same. The pulley system was still there of course, but it had shifted, somehow looking handcrafted, refined and more artistic, while still looking robust and powerful. Nordic runes were carved along the limbs and handle, set with a darker cobalt blue metal that glowed slightly. As I held it I could feel a slight tingling in my hand, not strong enough to hurt but definitely noticeable.

Silently I handed it to Ema, who looked at it for a full thirty seconds before nocking and pulling it back. As she did, electricity danced along the bowstring, getting more intense as she pulled back more. For a moment she stood there, sparks lighting up her metallic body before she released. In a split second the electricity flew from the bowstring and into the arrow, which hurtled across the forest and slammed into the tree, burying itself up almost halfway into the wood. A much larger explosion of electricity sizzled across the tree, leaving a few blackened gouges.

“Holy fuck.” Ema and I said at the same time, sharing a look.

“Try shooting it without an arrow.” I said, waving away Ema’s confusion. “It does something, I could feel it.”

Ema shook her head and pulled the bow back up, pulling the bowstring back to the normal position. As she did the same thing happened, a slowly increasing charge of electricity danced around the string. What was very different though was the spectral looking lightning arrow that formed as she pulled back. She held it for a moment before finally releasing it.

A crack of thunder echoed through the woods, rocking me back and making my ears ring. The arrow lept from the bow and struck out at the tree like a real bolt of lightning. The tree exploded in a flash, chunks of wood being tossed away all around. The top part of the tree collapsed slowly, the wood smoldering and smoking. For a full minute, neither of us said a word. When I finally did speak, I had to stop and center myself.

“That... that was intense.”

“Yeah... Intense.” She repeated.

“I think you can do that once.. maybe twice a day.” I explained. “It has a long recharge time.”

“Good... okay... yeah... But what if it's too much, even without the lightning bolt?” Ema responded eventually, her emerald eyes wide as she looked at me. “What if I want to hit something but not absolutely fuck it up?”

“That... is a fair point. I might have a solution to that. Last time I stuck a rotating selector switch on something it immediately latched onto something. If I combine one with the bow...”

“It might control the lightning.”

“Yeah, emphasis on might.” I agreed, taking a deep breath and shaking my head clear again. “I think it's likely to, but even if it doesn't it will just be a scroll wheel for something else and I'll make you a less... bombastic weapon.”

I quickly traveled back to the apartment, grabbed a selector switch and after a long pause, another landing pad. I traveled back to the truck and put the landing pad down before hopping off the back of the tailgate and walking back to Ema. She passed me the bow and I combined it with the scroll wheel selector switch before pushing it back out. The only thing it changed was adding a little cobalt blue clicking scroll wheel in the grip, close enough to use without putting it down, but not in the way of normal use. A few minutes of experimenting showed it was adjusting the extra power, even going as far as lowering the actual strength of the bow.

“I swear, magic is bridging the gaps and making it so things just work.” I said as Ema fired another arrow, this one seeming no different than what the old bow did. “I need to find a source of the magic concept with nothing else attached to it.”

“Speaking of which, why aren't you more concerned about using Thor's sparks?” Ema asked. “That concept, the one you think is Asgardian immortality or divinity, isn't that worth saving?”

“It's worth using if it makes stuff like this.” I said, motioning to her bow. “But there is no way in hell I'm starting any life extension or life upgrade with Thor's divine essence. I do not want the one eyed god on my case about stealing his son's mojo. He is a dick in every form he has ever taken in the marvel reality and in the normal myth. There is no way I'm tempting fate by fucking with that.”

“...He does seem like the kind of person to hold that against you.”

“Yeah. I'll try and crack extending my life, maybe ascending a bit at some point I'm sure.” I assured her. “But I'd rather not use someone else's essence to do it. Not to mention I still need to do a lot of testing before I'm ready to start modifying my body.”

“Fine, I suppose that makes sense.” She admitted.

“Besides, Thor coming back at some point is a pretty safe bet. It's just a matter of time.”

“Well... speaking of time, it's time for me to get back on the road.” Ema said, smiling as she handed me the bow. “Take this home please?”

“Sure. I got you another landing pad by the way.” I explained, taking the bow from her. “Bury it here, but if you find a better place for us to experiment let me know and we’ll move it there. Having a place where we can try the more dangerous stuff I make was something we desperately needed.”

“Got it. Now go home.” Ema said with a smile. “You’ve spent a lot of your relax day not relaxing.”

“Yes Ma’am” I said with a smirk and a salute. “Keep in touch. Travel Home.”