

Chapter 50 - Squad

It took a fraction of the time to make the second pair of wings for Ema than it did to make my pair, mostly because I didn't need to pause every step of the way to double check the concepts and plan out the next steps. Unlike mine, which were bound to me because I combined it with my deployable armor, Ema's was not bound to her, which led to some problems once she put them on.

"How do you control them so well?" She asked, her wings extended but sort of just hanging there. "I can sort of feel them but they barely respond."

I had her take them off, frowning as I examined them, carding them to double check the concepts. As far as I could tell they were almost identical to what mine had been. Eventually I realized it was the lack of binding that was causing the issue. The solution was to work in a secure cell phone, some left over controllers and radio controls that I got with the RC plane parts. A quick test showed a strong improvement, but not nearly as good as I expected. In a lather ditch effort I traveled to Chicago and managed to buy a few Emeralds. I combined them together and added them to the wings. This time when she put them on they instantly pushed open, moving with much more precision. She lifted off of the ground with a laugh, flying into the air and darting off.

I couldn't resist following after her, pushing my wings out of the teardrop shaped pack. With a few steady flaps I rose into the air and rushed after her, quickly catching up. We stopped mid air, probably a hundred feet from the ground and hovered, wings lazily flapping. Ema smirked and darted away, and the chase was on.

For what was probably around an hour we flew across the sky, spinning, diving and darting around, doing our best to set a pace the other couldn't keep up. After a particularly daring dive that I barely managed to pull out from, we both stopped about twenty feet off the ground.

"They don't work quite like real wings." Ema pointed out. "We shouldn't be able to hover like this without flying like hummingbirds."

"I noticed that. I'm too nimble as well... I think." I added, looking around the quarry. "Any idea how fast we were going?"

"You were hitting about a hundred and thirty." She said, her emerald eyes looking over the trees. "Your dives were much faster."

"Hmm... not nearly as fast as I was hoping." I said, frowning. "How fast was the board?"

“Only a bit faster.”

“Alright. Let's land. I'm going to see if I can't scrounge up some more feathers.”

After landing I quickly changed into a more reasonable civilian look before going back out, looking for more real feathers. It took a little while but I managed to buy some more from some shops I missed in Texas. When I got back I quickly went through the process of making more thrust feathers, adding them to both of our wings. Ema timed me again, and this time I was able to hit almost a hundred and seventy miles an hour.

“Better, but not enough.” I said, shaking my head. “I'm not going to get much more out of small scale RC parts though.”

“Diminishing returns?” Ema asked.

“Kinda?” I asked, before explaining. “More like the magnitude of thrust required to move me a hundred seventy miles per hour is great enough that these small additions aren't doing much anymore. I need better sources of thrust, but it still needs to be small enough that I can layer out its structure with feathers.”

“...You could talk to Tony Stark?” Ema suggested. “You did say you needed to make contact with him.”

“And I do.” I agreed. “But is now really the time for that?”

“I mean who has a better source of thrust than Iron Man?” She pointed out.

“You're not wrong...” I said, hemming and hawing before making my decision. “I'm going to call Fury, ask for an update. We can decide after we know what's going on.”

We flew down to the quarry, landing in front of the tent and plopping down into a seat after folding and tucking my wings back into their compact state. Fury picked up his phone almost immediately.

“Hey Fury, its Maker.”

“Maker, it's good to hear from you.” He said, throwing me off guard a bit. “Peggy was a bit vague about what you were up to.”

“I needed time, that's all.” I explained. “I had some repairs to do, and I had a project I needed to finish. That's all done though.”

“Good. How soon can you prepare the equipment for my squad?”

"I could have it done by tomorrow, if it was my top priority." I admitted. "Should that be my top priority? Also, just how many people are on this squad?"

"Yes, it should be." He answered simply. "And there are eight agents in the squad."

"And what about those larger strikes you have planned?"

"If you arm a squad of Shields finest like you armed Steve, Peggy and Bucky then that will be more than enough." He explained. "Your equipment has literally saved Shield from whatever fucked up plans that Hydra had. But no offense Maker, you are an unwieldy sledgehammer when I need scalpels. Steve, Peggy and Bucky know how to scale back, how to be precise and most importantly how to follow orders. I saw what you did to Pierce Maker. I need less of that."

"To be fair I had just been impaled by my own arrows." I said, reaching down to activate my lie detection belt. "Which reminds me, how many more of my arrows do you have?"

"We have recovered quite a few." He explained without a hint of shame. "All of which can be returned to you."

"What do you have?"

"A handful of Ice, shock, your rope arrows that keep people quiet and a few chain arrows." He said honestly. "We also have the pieces of several explosive ones, those are inert."

"Fine. I'll be in to pick them up at the Triskelion. Don't forget the deal."

"We will have your loaned equipment ready." He assured me. "But why the Triskelion?"

"I assumed it would be easier for you." I said with a shrug, despite the fact that Fury couldn't see me. "And I want to see it."

"We don't give out tours." He said, a hint of annoyance creeping into his voice. "But it would be easier."

"Great. See you tomorrow." I said, before quickly adding. "Oh! And make sure all of your people have the samples I need ready, with a secure room for me to work in."

"Fine." He responded, before hanging up. I looked down at my phone for a moment before shrugging.

"Alright. Apparently Shield doesn't want my help." I explained, getting a surprised look from Ema. "Fury said I am a sledgehammer when he needs scalpels."

“...Well I mean...”

“Oh fuck you.”

With that conversation over, I spent the rest of the day and part of the night shopping and putting together the equipment for Fury’s enhanced squad. I wasn’t cranking anything to eleven for them, but I definitely didn’t phone it in.

Each agent would get a bulletproof undersuit and helmet, silent armored boots, a strength enhancing cuff and a stamina/speed enhancing cuff. I made a few extra speed cuffs as well, figuring they were relatively harmless equipment that I could give as incentives or gifts. I also made the quadruple stacked pocket knives that I made sure couldn’t cut through my undersuit on its highest setting. My final additions were a minor healing amulet for each agent and two healing flashlights. Fury or whoever was in charge of the squad would have to pick who they went to.

I was beginning to regret promising such a large order when Ema spoke up, sounding rather disappointed.

“Carson, please tell me you're not worried about keeping track of anything when you spent so much time working on those tracking tablets.”

I let out a long sigh and shook my head, before spending my last half hour at the quarry putting together a tracker for everything that I have made using the Deck. I basically combined a bunch of random stuff together, making sure to really mash up the concepts before working them into the same GPS, tablet and compass combo that I used. It took a lot of layering and I’m pretty sure the only reason it worked was because I was layering magic as well as bound charms of Saint Anthony, patron saint of lost things.

In the end I held a tablet that was a combination of seven thousand dollars worth of stuff, but accurately tracked everything I had ever made. I could even tap on the map points and the tablet would bring up a little picture of the object, the same image that the Deck would show on its card face. I watched some of the rings move around, following what I assumed was a squad of soldiers apprehending Hydra agents, then a few arrows as they started their journey to DC, from a few different places around New England. I could also see Natasha’s guns at the Triskelion, while Clint’s advanced glasses were... somewhere in Iowa?

“Ema, does Shield have a base in Iowa?”

“Uh.... no, not publicly at least.” She answered.

“Ah... okay yeah I’m definitely keeping this creation to myself.” I said, carding it and flourishing it into the Deck. “It’s a bit too Big Brother for me to show off.”

----- *The Next Day* -----

I spent the first half of the day putting together the guns for Fury's squad. It took most of the morning, as well as a significant chunk of my remaining guns, but I managed to put together eight different pairs of firearms, a primary and a side arm. Each one was double stacked, was adjustable and had extended magazines. The final count was three M4A1's, one HK416, one M500 shotgun, two M38 DMR's and a single M249 machine gun. The belt fed machine gun was a little difficult until I realized I could just expand the box that was attached to the bottom of the gun. For pistols it was a split between five beretta M9's and three SIG M11's. None of them could penetrate my undersuit.

When I was done building reality busting weapons I emptied out two crates, which was easy to do considering how low on guns I was now, and stored the weapons away, carding the crates when I was done. After that was a late breakfast before heading to DC.

I arrived at the Triskelion early in the afternoon, crossing the lone bridge in the super truck. The guards manning the security gate were tense, but quickly waved me through. I continued across the bridge, pulling into the rather interestingly built structure. I pulled up to the main entrance before Ema and I stepped out of the truck, carding it as I did. A bit flashy, sure, but Ema had refused to let me fly in so I had to make do.

I smiled as I saw Natasha by the doorway. She looked tired but as far as I could tell she was uninjured.

"Hey, how are you?" I asked.

"About as well as you can imagine." She said with a shrug. "I should thank you though. And not just for the tablets. I owe you, Barton and I both do."

"What happened?"

"We almost ran headfirst into a trap last night." She explained. "A few Hydra hiding out in a random safe house had the whole place rigged to blow. We got close but Clint noticed something suspicious with those glasses of his. The bastards still set it off though. Barton caught some shrapnel in his arm."

"Damn." I said, shaking my head. "He doing okay?"

"Yeah, Peggy healed him the first time she saw him." The red head super spy said with a small smile. "But he is still taking a day or so to rest."

"That's good." I said with a nod. "So... Where too?"

Natasha nodded and turned, heading into the building. It was a steady rush of activity, with everyone looking ragged but determined. People were quickly heading about their business, some people even jogging. We got a lot of looks, probably because Ema and I were all armored up... and she was still blue.

“Getting a lot of attention.” Natasha said, smiling over her shoulder as she led me to an elevator.

“Yeah... And none of them are pulling their weapons.” I joked, stepping into the enclosed space, Ema following behind. “That’s a good start.”

“Considering how the last few days have gone, I would say that’s a good sign. It’s hard not to see threats everywhere after learning that there were, in fact, threats everywhere.”

“How goes the Hydra hunt anyway?” I asked as she tapped a button and the elevator started going down.

“We’ve almost cleared out the US of all the smaller pockets.” She said, leaning against the wall of the elevator, arms crossed. “We are worried about what some of the larger pockets are doing but we are hoping the suddenness of the attack is leaving them scrambled. We seem to have snagged quite a few higher ups in the first twenty four hours, which will hopefully help with that.”

“When are the big strikes planned?” I asked, following her out as the elevator doors opened.

“As soon as this new squad adapts to the gear you’re bringing.”

We arrived at a large underground training facility, equipped with exercise gear and a small military style obstacle course. I spotted Fury immediately, standing in front of eight Shield agents, all of them standing at attention as he loudly explained the situation to them. To the side was Steve and Bucky, the former waving as he spotted me. I pointed them out to Natasha, who nodded, leading me over.

“Steve, Bucky, good to see both of you in one piece.” I said, shaking both of their hands. “Where is Peggy?”

“She is spending some time in the infirmary fixing people up.” Steve answered. “We are meeting up for lunch.”

Before we could continue making small talk Fury got my attention, gesturing to two crates that were being brought in. They were filled with all of the loaned gear, save the tablets.

“Seems like everything is here.” I said, nodding to Fury. “Before we start this I want to make something absolutely clear. If you make this squad of soldiers into your personal enhanced death squad, or let them get used as the Security Council's attack dogs, I will hunt them down and take the gear back.”

“They are soldiers Maker.” He said, his face in a minor scowl. “What they do isn't pretty.”

“And I'm not a fucking idiot.” I fired right back. “I know the difference between unfortunate necessities and unnecessary brutality. If you misuse them I will get my gear back. Don't push me to prove you won't be able to stop me.”

We stared at each other for a full five seconds before Fury nodded. I doubted he liked having to buckle under my demands, even if he most likely shared my worries and convictions.

“You have my word.” He said, without triggering my belt.

I simply nodded in response, letting Natasha guide me to a separate room. One by one I asked each agent, none of whom I recognized, questions about their allegiances, their belief in Shield's ideals, everything I could think of. After each interview, and after Ema completed a deep scan of the room for cameras, I bonded their gear to them. The guns and healing flashlights were distributed without any fuss either, the Staff Sergeant in charge of the squad quickly telling each soldier what they were getting.

In all the process took an hour, with most of that time spent on the interviews. I did notice that very little of the equipment changed as I bound them to their new owners. A few color changes happened to the smaller bits, and everything resized to the perfect fit, but in general they stayed the same. I couldn't help but wonder if that was some sort of meta reaction to them not being main characters in the stories I knew from before coming here, or if it was just because they saw all of it as equipment for a job and that changed something. Either way Fury was happy that nobody's guns turned bright red because it was their favorite color.

When I was done I stepped back into the large training room, watching as eight agents got used to their new limits, with both Steve and Bucky giving them pointers on how to handle their enhanced strength. Before I could head over to offer my own advice, Fury cleared his throat. With him was Natasha, Agent Hill, Agent Coulson, along with another group of agents, around fifteen of them.

“I assume they are here for the lie detection bands and the knockout buzzers?” I asked.

“Yes, some of them will be getting the band, some of them the buzzers, a few of them will be getting both.”

“Alright, let's get this over with.”

In total I bound fifteen knockout rings and fifteen lie detection bands, five of each going to Fury, Natasha, Coulson, Agent Hill and an agent I hadn't recognized by sight but whose name I did, Bobbi Morse. I racked my brain for anything I could remember about her, but beyond that she was married to Clint for a while and got kidnapped by the Skrull at some point I couldn't really remember. I did fake a joking question at the start about her being an alien, which got a laugh, and more importantly an honest negative response.

About forty five minutes later I was finally done and feeling antsy. Natasha seemed to pick up on that, offering to escort me out of the building since I was done.

"You don't do sitting still very well, do you?" She asked as we stepped into the elevator.

"Lately? No, not at all."

"What changed?" She asked curiously.

"This, my ability." I said, gesturing to myself, specifically my armor. "It's hard to just sit and do nothing when I could be doing so much with my ability. Part of it is wanting to help. I could help the world in some crazy ways, but I'm not really a 'starving myself to feed the others' kind of person and dedicating my life to popping out equipment non stop would be very much starving myself. It's much more that sitting still seems like such a waste of time."

"I suppose that's understandable." She said, but stayed quiet after that.

We made our way back out into the parking lot, seemingly alone. She turned before I could flick out the super truck.

"Maker... Does your amulet fix things that have been removed?"

"I think so." I said honestly. "It fixed Bucky's arm, which seems to point to yes, but there is no way to know without testing it on the specific thing."

"How does that work exactly?" She asked, looking at me, watching my face. She looked... vulnerable for a moment, quickly hiding behind a blank face.

"It's a pure concept of healing." I explained. "What is injured, broken or unwell is fixed, returning to a whole state."

"But is Bucky's arm... still his arm?"

For a moment I stared at her, my mind flicking through what she could be talking about, trying to figure out if someone she knew was missing something. Then my brain screeched to a halt. Natasha in the comics was in some way infertile because of the augments given to her in the red room. She aged extremely slowly and had an improved immune system, but could never

get pregnant. She wasn't one hundred going on thirty in this reality, I knew this because I had handled her blood before, it was completely un-augmented. Was she still infertile?

"I would say that it is still his arm. But... Honestly there are some implications for other parts that get a little... less clear. It's not something I had considered yet."

She looked at me for a long moment, her eyes locked on mine before she seemed to settle on something. Before she could say anything I raised her hand.

"I don't think a parking garage is the best place to discuss something like that though." I said, gesturing to the busy and packed lot. "Why don't you call me, sometime when all this calms down."

"And you'll help?" She asked. "I can pay if that's a problem, it might not-"

"I don't want your money Natasha." I said waving her off. "I charged Shield because it's an organization that can foot the bill and I need money and resources to work on my own projects. This sounds like something much more personal, and I would love to do a favor for a friend."

She again studied my face before smiling. It was a large smile, not perfect, not crafted to be just the right amount of seductive and reassuring. It was a real smile, the first one I had seen her share.

It was honestly beautiful.

"Alright Maker. I'll give you a call." She said, still smiling.