

The next few days were filled with slow but exciting progress. When I woke up the next morning I was greeted by an absolutely pristine black motorcycle with a brand new key in the ignition. It took me and Ema a couple of hours to take a few pictures outside, then use those images to set up a craigslist post for about half what it was actually worth. I was hoping that selling a motorcycle worth twelve grand for six and acting like I had no idea what I was selling would keep questions to a minimum. After that it was mostly a waiting game.

By the next afternoon we had a half dozen offers for the motorcycle. A quick phone call to one of the higher offers and we had a deal. I rode my bike out to a small parking lot in Brooklyn and walked away seven grand richer. I immediately went to the junkyard and got two more wrecks, spinning a bullshit story and having them delivered to a random parking lot in Queens. By the end of the night another motorcycle was in my living room, slowly being repaired by the tablet, with another one just waiting to start.

During my down time I eventually started investigating all of the guns I had found during my last excursion. I quickly found that I had no idea what I was going to do with them. They held several concepts that could be useful but I wasn't sure how to combine them. I had four pistols and two rifles, as well as two different types of shotguns. My first instinct was to combine a rifle and a pistol to make a pistol that hit like a rifle, but they were two different conceptually and functionally. I could feel the concepts would work directly against each other in some cases, while in others they would double up on negative concepts.

On a whim I combined two of the pistols, mostly to examine the results. They stacked up on power as well as a few other positive concepts, but when I pulled out the magazine I realized the bullets had become a weird mix of two different calibers. I needed to either get my hands on multiple guns of the same make, model and caliber, or I needed to treat each gun as something to upgrade with different concepts, rather than just stacking them. Eventually I put them aside until I had more money to play around with, and had access to more guns in general.

The next morning I set up the next motorcycle in the living room before spending a few hours doing some research with Ema. Eventually we found a cheap truck for sale nearby, one that I could use as my civilian vehicle. It was parked in the apartment parking by the end of the night, the repair tablet hooked up inside of the glove box. Ema and I had gone through the list of possible repairs, selecting everything that needed desperately to be fixed, but made sure it still looked like a six year old used truck on the outside, windshield crack included. The next morning came the real fun, a four hour trip to the DMV. With the truck registered and officially mine I hooked up my new license plates, drove back to the apartment to spend the rest of the night setting up believable craigslist posts for the motorcycles, once again selling them cheap. This time however I advertised them as being available much deeper in state to keep from selling too many things around the city. By the end of the next day I had delivered both of them, spending four hours driving around the state. I was sixteen grand richer and exhausted.

I got a pizza to celebrate.

When I eventually went to sleep I was out like the light, smiling as I imagined all the things I could buy and build.

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

The next morning Ema and I sat at the living room couch, planning our big build day. I had gotten up early so we would have plenty of time.

“Now that we have a decent chunk of money, and at least one, hopefully two ways to make more, it’s time to start really brainstorming.” I explained, tapping a pen. “We can afford to experiment, try new things and make stuff that might be useful, rather than stuff we desperately need.”

“You should improve your under armor layer.” Ema immediately suggested. “Maybe some titanium plating?”

“Where the hell would I get titanium plating?”

“You can buy it at metal working shops.” She responded, before scoffing at my raised eyebrow. “Do you think I spend all my time on your laptop watching cat videos?”

“Alright, first up is some titanium plating.” I agreed, writing it down on my note pad. “I want to go back to another armor shop, see if I can find a full facial helmet, I think we can make one into something real special with the right items.”

“I think upgrading some of the stuff we already have might be good as well.” Ema pointed out.

“Some of it. I was already hitting serious diminishing returns in my cuffs and my necklace.” I explained. “For those it’s about finding new sources of those concepts, or finding new places I could double up on specific enhancements. That said I could make some more arrows, and make my bow better as well.”

“What about a new weapon?” Ema asked. “You need some variety.”

“You’re not wrong.” I admitted. “I’ll start dedicating some time to coming up with something. For now I’m going to focus on more arrows and an improved bow.”

“Fair enough I suppose.” Ema relented. “What else do you plan on making?”

“I have a few ideas for some specific things, but mostly today is about experimenting, finding new things to build with. When we are at the metal working shop I’m going to pick up anything that looks interesting, same goes for anywhere we go. Should also go shopping at some pawn

shops and antique stores. It's a Marvel reality, I'm just as likely to find a mystical artifact as I am to find junk."

"When you get back, when you're done experimenting you need to call Shield." She reminded me. "It's been long enough, they probably have a response."

"Yeah, I'll do it after I'm done with everything."

The day planned I got dressed and ready before heading out, leaving Ema alone in the apartment. I almost pushed out my bike when I remembered my truck, heading behind the apartment building and climbing in. The truck started easily and I couldn't help but smile.

My first destination was a metal shop two hours's drive out of the city. While there were shops where I could buy simple metals from much closer, this place advertised itself as having much more variety in alloys and metals. The drive was easy once I got through a bit of morning traffic, which I spent chatting with Ema on the phone. When we did eventually get there I hopped out and headed inside, immediately realizing this place was not for arts and craft dabblers. Rows and rows of raw material lined the interior, all separated by what size, shape and forms of the metal. There were long bars of metal, square billets and flat sheets. As I looked around, a worker came up to me with a smile.

"Hello there, can I help you?" He asked, pulling off a glove to shake my hand.

"Yeah actually I'm looking for two things, one simple and the other more broad. I need a variety of titanium stock. I'm working on an art piece and a client demanded it be made from titanium. I'll need some sheets, some rods and a few hundred feet of wire. I'm also looking to experiment with a variety of metals. Tungsten for one, aluminum as well, but I'm interested in what sort of alloys and materials you have in stock."

"We got plenty of titanium and aluminum, but you're gonna have to be more specific about the last request. We do have some tungsten alloy but it's rather expensive."

"That's fine. Let's pick out some titanium, aluminum and tungsten, then after that we can go through everything else." I suggested, getting a nod in return.

"Alright, we can do that. Our titanium is this way..."

The man led me through the warehouse and I selected five thousand dollars in titanium, aluminum and tungsten alloy stock. Most of that was spent on tungsten, still only getting a handful of square plates a foot long and a few millimeters thick. It was worth it though, I managed to card a small piece for a moment and it was much more dense than steel. I also got a few bits of copper stock as well. As all that was loaded into my truck by other workers I tried to explain what else I was looking for.

"I get a lot of clients who like being told something is particularly strong, fire resistant, stuff like that." I explained, leaning into my artist lie. "I usually just tell them some facts about steel and their ignorance does the rest. However, I would like to be able to brag about a particular metal's heat resistance or its tensile strength. I know it's a weird request but I'm basically looking for metals I can brag about using in my sculptures."

"Hmm... That's a tough one." He admitted, pausing for a minute to think. "I think we have a bunch molybdenum alloy sheets, it is extremely heat resistant. Let me check."

The man left me alone at the counter, heading back into the rows of stock, tools and materials. When he returned a few minutes later he was carrying a spool of wire and a blow torch.

"We still have some of the molybdenum alloy sheets."

"I'll take it, as much as i can get for a thousand dollars." I said with a nod, before focusing in on the spool of wire. "What's that?"

"This is Nitinol." He explained with a smile. "It's a memory shaping metal. Watch."

He pulled out a few inches of the wire, then heated it up with the blow torch. He then bent it before sticking it into a nearby glass of water. After it had cooled completely he took it and folded it around into a spiral, before clicking the blowtorch on again and heating it slightly. The metal slowly started to shift back to its original form.

"It's a Nickel and Titanium alloy, that when you heat it up and quench it, any time you heat it up again it will shift back into its original form."

"Holy... that's incredible!" I said, honestly shocked. Who knew what kind of concepts that metal would have?

"We have a stack of sheets and two spools of wire." He said. "In total it's about another two grand."

"I'll take it!" I said excitedly. "That is exactly what I needed!"

It took another twenty minutes to get everything loaded into the back of my truck. Once again I got a weird look paying in cash, but I was too excited to care, especially because I was wearing my face changing mask. Though it was slightly more understandable now as I passed him over eight thousand dollars in cash.

When I left the store I immediately carded the Nitinol, smiling when it had exactly the concepts I expected it to have. As much as I wanted to rush home and experiment I needed a lot more stuff, So I focused on my next destination, the largest body armor shop in the area, and coincidentally one I hadn't been to yet. It was a forty five minute drive away from the metal shop, though I

stopped at one point to walk to the back of the truck and card most of the tungsten, titanium and copper, having noticed how hard of a time the truck was having.

Walking into the shop I immediately headed to a rack of helmets, focusing on the full face coverage style. I could tell they were designed to be taticool rather than actually tactical, but they were all still rated to be level three armor. I grabbed three different versions and carried them to the desk, quickly putting them down before walking back to the full body armor sections.

After a moment of debate I grabbed a set of armor, this one that was specifically made to be worn over existing clothing. It was a series of rigid composite plates, held in place by straps and buckles. The vital areas were rated as level three body armor, the rest being rated two. It actually kind of reminded me of the combat armor from Fallout 4, though not nearly as bulky. It came with leg, knee and thigh plates for my lower body as well as chest, stomach, spine, back and shoulder plates for my upper body, and vambraces and bicep plates for my arms.

I ended up spending two thousand dollars on the armor, including the helmets, five hundred dollars on a ballistic shield, and another five hundred on kevlar inserts. The shield was incredibly basic, a giant rectangle with a slight curve on the short side, about three feet long and a foot and a half wide. It was only rated two but I would be modifying, so I'm sure it would end up improving. I paid and left quickly, carding everything as I sat in the truck.

"Next stop, a convenience store." I said to myself, heading out of the parking lot.

It didn't take me much driving before I found a Walmart, so I pulled into the parking lot. I was in and out fast, only buying two dozen umbrellas, a few containers of cornstarch and a prepaid cell phone. I got a few looks as the cashier scanned the items, but I was honestly past caring.

After that I spent a few more hours driving around, visiting a few stores and buying more of everything I had used to make my strength and runners cuffs, minus the jewelry, though I did go to a few jewelry stores looking for a torc of some kind, settling on a thicker brass one that had a small knob of metal at each end of the loop. After that I visited a hardware store, buying two dozen drill bit sets, multiple boxes of nails and screws as well as a dozen locks. I also bought two medical air filter units with extra filters and three half face respirators with a dozen spare cartridges.

I did my best to drive back to my apartment as calmly as I could. I sang along with the music, watched the cars around me, even started going through what I would say to Agent Coulson when I called. It worked for the most part and I arrived back with only a few close calls caused by rushing. When I finally slammed the door of my apartment shut I turned to find Ema floating only a few feet in front of me. We were silent for a moment before I couldn't hold it back any more.

"I spent around fourteen thousand dollars." I admitted in a rush.

“WHAT?!” She shouted back, reaching a volume I didn't know she could achieve. “How did you spend that much!”

“Metal is surprisingly expensive! Especially tungsten.” I explained. “Plus I bought more armor to make into a super suit.”

“I thought you already had a super suit!?”

“No, I have my stealth suit and my casual suit. This is going to be an honest to god super suit.” I explained, walking into the living room, uncarding the small stuff I had bought. “I'm going to wear it over my under armor suit and I'm hoping to make it boost me like my cuffs do.”

As I explained some of the things that I bought I finished unloading everything small before heading into the kitchen, carrying the bags of cornstarch I had bought. A quick check on the internet told me the perfect ratio of water to cornstarch, and soon I had a huge pot of oobleck. I stuck my hand into it slowly, pulling it out completely covered in the thick goop. I carded it and repeated the process until I had a dozen cards of the strange, sometimes liquid, sometimes solid material. The goop had several concepts, the concept for changing and transformation the most prevalent. I filled the still messy pot with water, letting it soak while I returned to the living room. I flicked out a card, one containing a single spool of memory metal and smirked.

The card contained a few concepts, but one that stood out was transformation. I quickly grabbed an umbrella and carded it, combining it with a single oobleck card. The two cards combined and transformation became even more prevalent, and with another umbrella added in, so did unfolding and extending.

Standing I headed into the kitchen and pushed out the sheets of nitinol, leaning them against the fridge. I repeated this for the titanium and aluminum stock, before pulling one of the nitinol sheet back in, adding it to the amalgamation. Once again the transformation concept went up. After adding a third and fourth umbrella as well as a second card of oobleck the primary concepts were transformation, extending and unfolding, with protection sliding just behind them thanks to the umbrellas. It was weak however so I added in a few kevlar inserts to bring it forward.

With a smile I set the amalgamation card aside before pushing out the tungsten sheets, each one only a single square foot and less than a quarter of an inch thick, onto the coffee table. The table started to groan so I carded them all again. For a moment I pause before carding an aluminum plate, carding the table and combining them together. I pushed the table back out into its place before pushing out the tungsten again, grinning when the table held without complaint.

I grabbed a tungsten plate in a card before carding a sheet of aluminum and titanium, combing the aluminum and titanium before combining it with the tungsten. I could feel its concepts skyrocket, the aluminum's light weight concept cutting down the tungsten heavy concept considerably. I added a second and third sheet of aluminum, getting rid of it completely and making it actually lightweight, though only minorly. However I could feel a soft concept further

behind everything, so I combined a second sheet of titanium. My final addition was a sheet of molybdenum, adding a huge heat resistant concept to the sheet. The card now held a large sheet of metal that was incredibly strong, flexible enough to not shatter, relatively lightweight and incredibly heat resistant.

With a flick of my hand I summoned the ballistic shield and combined it with the newly made metal sheet, and with a push I was holding it in my hands. It was the same shape as before, but the once matte black composite material was a dark silver. It felt lighter than it had been originally, but as I carded it once again I could tell the protectiveness had grown massively. There was no doubt in my mind that this shield was way more than bulletproof. Quickly I repeated the process of making the metal sheet, applying it to my new vambraces, greatly improving their protectiveness as well.

“And now, for the final step!” I said with a chuckle that was definitely not manic.

I summoned the transforming heavy amalgamation, studying it once more. Though it was filled with concepts I didn't want, they were far enough back that I was pretty sure they wouldn't affect anything. Mentally crossing my fingers I pushed my newly improved vambraces from their card, grabbing the vambrace for my left arm and recarding it before combining it with my transforming card. I then combined it with the improved ballistic shield. Holding the result card in my hand I could see that it was B ranked, exuded protection and defense like nothing I had ever made before, and still had heavy concepts of transformation, extending and unfolding. The image on the card still looked like a vambrace but had obviously changed...

“Wish me luck Ema.” I said, wincing as I prepared to push out the card.

“Good Luck!”

I pushed the vambrace from its card and held it in my hand. I hurriedly pulled up my sleeve and attached the vambrace, strapping it tight. Once on I focused on extending the shield, but nothing happened. I frowned, lifting the armor up, examining it closely before finding a small button on the inner side. I reached out and pressed it with my thumb, my whole arm jerking as I do. In the span of half a second a shield, almost identical to the improved version, extended out in front of me. The process was almost fluid, though still mechanical as it unfolded like origami and extended out. Once fully deployed any seams or creases faded, leaving a perfectly shaped shield. Both Ema and I were silent for a moment, basking in my success.

“Does... does it go back down?” Ema asked after a moment.

“Uhhh...”

I quickly pressed the button again and the shield shrank, the process of extending and unfolding going in reverse.

“Fuck yeah.” I said with a smirk. “Now to figure out how to do that with the rest of my armor.”